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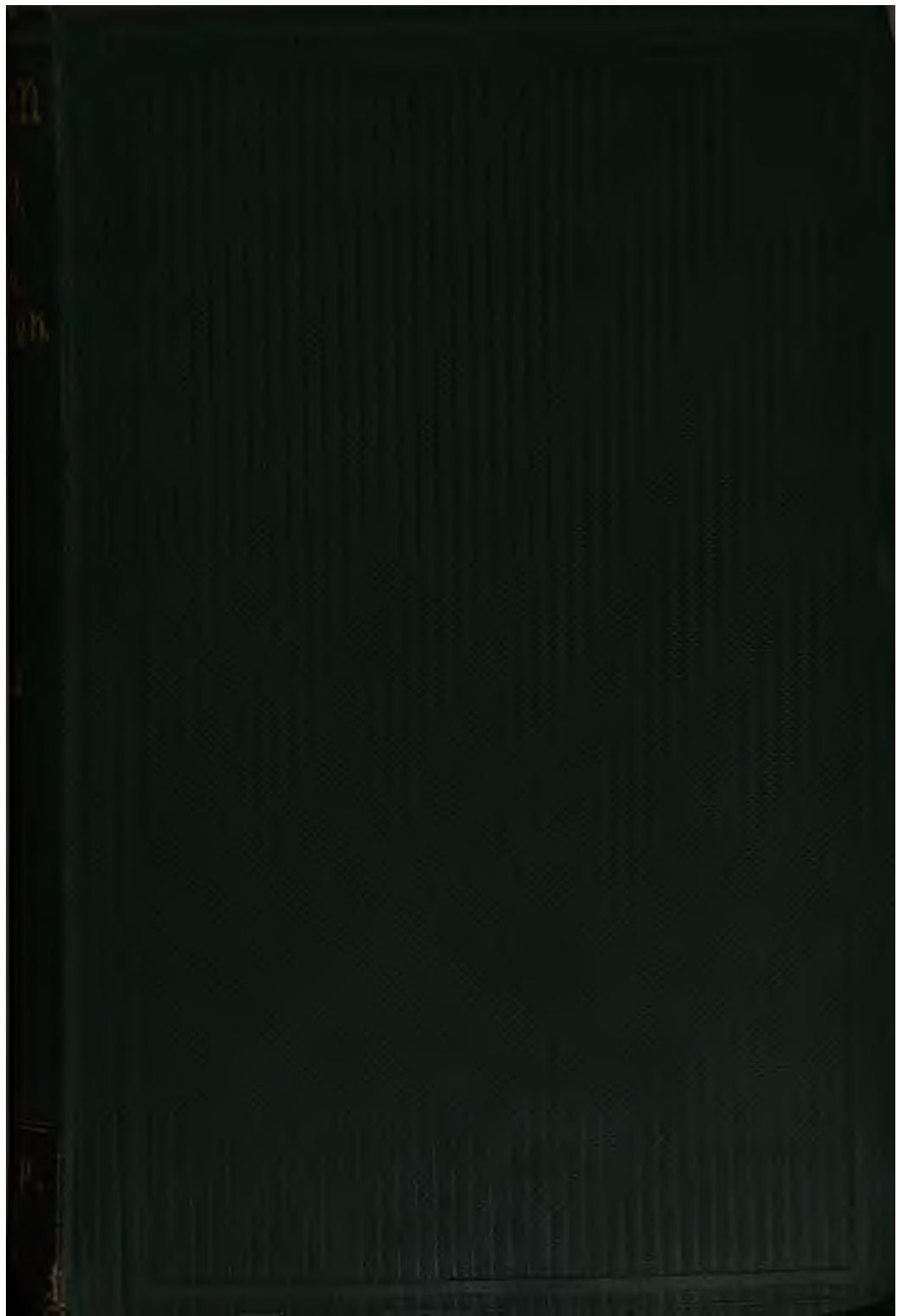
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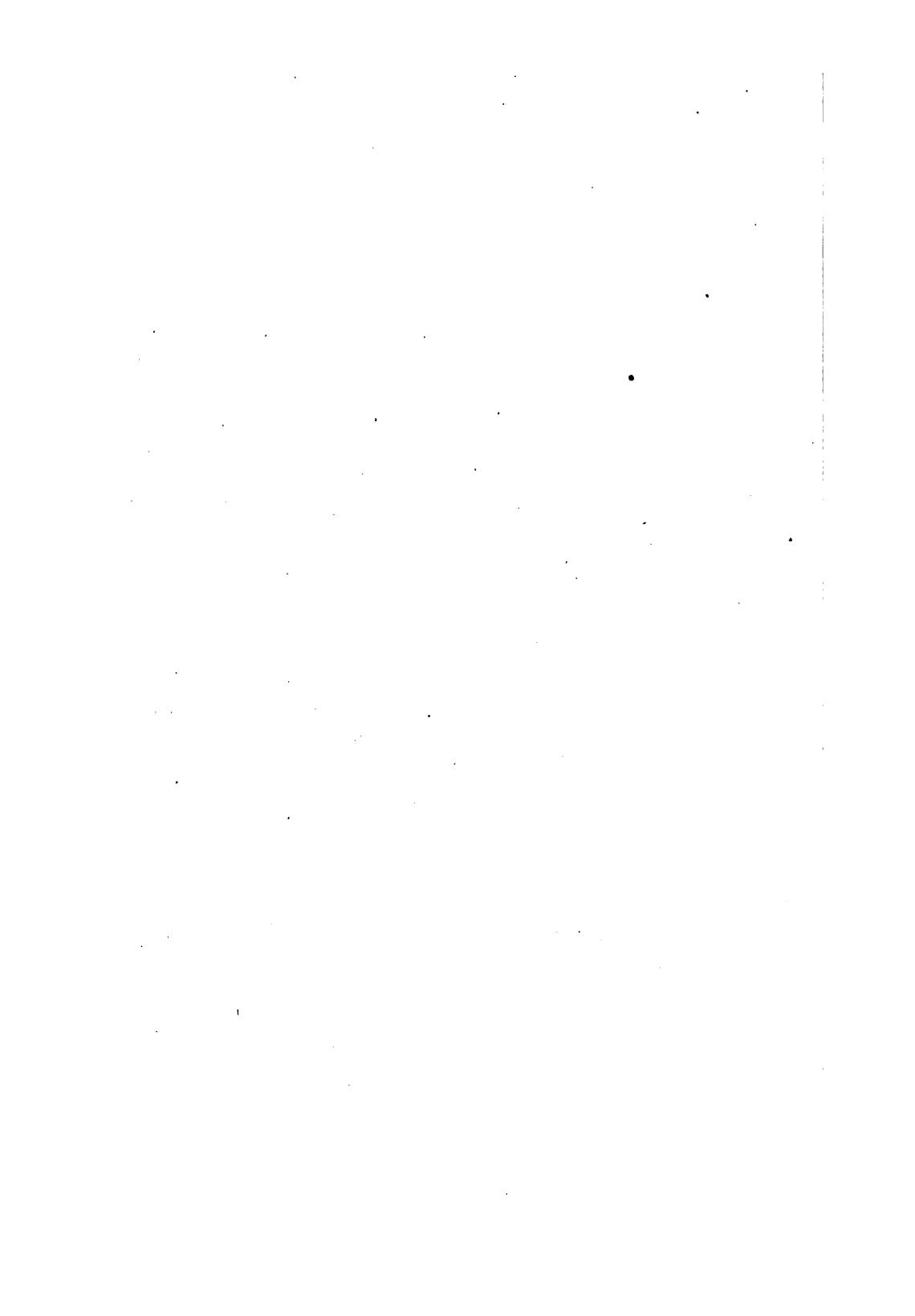




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QUEEN MAB.

VOL. III.

QUEEN MAB.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH,

AUTHOR OF

"NATHALIE," "ADELE,"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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P A R T T H E T H I R D.

CONTINUED.

M A B'S F A I T H.



QUEEN MAB.

CHAPTER VI.

THE first feeling of Mab when she awoke the next day was one of terror. She did not think of her escape from the sea waves in the cave, of her deliverance from Miss Emily's frenzied grasp ; she thought of that moment which had been the revelation of her new destiny, and she thought of it with despair. Joyful is the wakening of love in the free heart, but dreary is its first consciousness in the heart that has willingly forfeited its liberty. Every tie of honour, affection, and habit bound Mab to Robert Ford. He was her early friend and teacher ; he was the son of her adopted father, the brother of William and Edward

—the nephew of the woman who had been kind to her as a mother. To be false to him, whilst he was thousands of miles away, making a home for her in a new land, was the blackest treachery ; Mab could not think of it without horror.

With this feeling blended another—revolted pride. What ! to have been free two days before, and now to be a captive ! To have surrendered her whole being, heart, and soul to a stranger whose words and looks she could reckon ! She felt bowed with shame at the thought. She hid her face in her hands, and buried it in her pillow, and wept aloud in the bitterness of her grief.

“ My dear, what is the matter ? ” asked Miss Lavinia’s kind voice.

Mab looked up, and saw Miss Ford bending over her with a face full of concern. She tried to laugh, and said, with forced cheerfulness,

“ I have been over-excited, aunt—that is all. How is Miss Emily ? ”

“ Oh ! quite safe—but no one is to see her now, save Miss Gardiner and Honour. She must be kept very quiet, says Doctor Flinn ; a very nice man. Don’t you think so ? ”

“ I don’t know—I did not notice, aunt.”

She spoke so faintly and looked so ill, that Miss Lavinia induced her not to get up, and even to spend that day in complete repose. But when the

next morning came round, Mab, though still paler, and more worn-looking, insisted on rising.

"I must be up and moving, aunt," she said, "or I am undone."

Miss Lavinia was accustomed to let Mab have her way, and though she thought the young girl looked very unwell, she remonstrated no more. Mab rose, dressed herself, said her prayers, and went downstairs. Breakfast was over, but Miss Ellen was below, ready and anxious to keep her company.

Poor Miss Ellen! she was full of her sister, and of the Saturday night's adventures.

"Dear Emily! she is *so* excitable," she said, plaintively; "but, my dear child, you are very pale. Do take a second cup of coffee."

"Do you think it will give me a colour?" asked Mab, trying to rally.

"Well, my dear, you do not want a colour now," innocently said Miss Ellen.

And indeed Mab did not, for the door had opened, and Mr. O'Lally had entered the room.

With great composure he inquired how she had slept, and how she felt; and quickly rallying, Mab answered him in the same unconcerned tone.

There was nothing in Mr. O'Lally's calm manner of which Mab could complain; it was courteous and kind, and she could ask for no more.

But if anything in the long vigil by Miss Emily's sick-bed could have awakened hopes and wishes in a girl's heart, Mr. O'Lally's looks and tones on this morning were calculated to dispel either.

There are few men worthy of the name in its meaning of strength and power, that are not masters of their passions. When they are not, it is that they will not be so, and that they prefer self-indulgence to self-subjection. Mr. O'Lally's blood was not cold, but his will was strong, his judgment was calm, and he had resolved to conquer, in its very dawn, the attraction that made him think Mab so irresistibly charming. She reminded him of his lost Mary, but as the lovely fulfilment of that broken promise. His reason had never approved the preference he gave her over Annie Gardiner, but Mab was all that he liked in either; she had Mary's bright face and golden hair, she had the looks and smiles that moved his very heart, and, with these, the nobler attributes of womanhood: the open mind, the generous nature. More than this, she had the charm in which Annie failed, at least for him, that something without a name, which makes the beloved woman queen of a man's heart, he himself knows not why.

And yet he had scarcely become conscious of his passion, when, without stopping to ask himself how it might fare with Mab, he had resolved to

check and subdue it. Mr. O'Lally had grown up in the worship of blood, in the reverence of pure and unsullied descent. Had Mab been the poorest Irish peasant's daughter, he would have married her with careless unconcern of what the little world around him might think and say. But he knew Mab's story, he felt convinced she was the child of sin and crime, he despised Mr. Ford, and he thought it possible that the disgrace of her birth might be revealed some day. His judgment and his pride alike forbade him to wed a woman who would bring shame as a dowry to him, and an inheritance to her children. Had he been a younger man he might not have thought so much on the subject ; but Mr. O'Lally was twenty-six ; he had loved, and conquered his love, and what he had done once he thought that he could do again. Perhaps he overrated his own strength, and did not take into sufficient account the proverbial weakness of a man's first love, and the hidden strength of a second passion ; but there was this much to say in his favour : his had been, from his boyhood, a life of many sacrifices and much self-denial, and he was accustomed to see many loved aims recede before him, and to bend his will to what he most detested.

The task which habit rendered easy to him, the calmness and composure of his behaviour made

less painful to Mab. Her own emotion had not allowed her to see his ; and she had felt conscious of her own love without suspecting that it might be returned. She only thought of Robert, of her plighted faith and her involuntary infidelity. She did not allow herself to dwell on the possibility that Mr. O'Lally might feel even more than she felt, or to be disappointed because his manner to her was only that of the courteous host. But what she admitted as just, Mab was woman enough to resent, and that resentment Mr. O'Lally had not the fortitude to bear with indifference.

Doctor Flinn called early at O'Lally's Town, and he gave a most favourable report of Miss Emily's condition. Miss Ellen's spirits rose, Miss Lavinia was elated, and Mr. O'Lally and Miss Gardiner spoke with increased cheerfulness of Miss Emily's rapid improvement.

The knowledge that she had caused no irremediable misfortune soothed Mab ; she looked calm, though pale and serious, and her looks and her quiet manner secured the especial favour of Doctor Flinn, with whom Miss Gardiner had never been a favourite.

Doctor Flinn was accustomed to speak his mind very openly at O'Lally's Town, and he lost no time in conveying to Miss Ellen Ford his sense of Mab's merit.

"Your sister is going on famously," he said cheerfully, addressing that lady—"famously. I shall drop in again this evening, and we will have a round game of whist, Miss Nelly, and you and I shall be partners without cutting for it, and we will pair Mr. O'Lally and Miss Winter—and they shall be partners, not for life, unless, indeed, it be their pleasure."

Once more their looks met : a dangerous luxury; there was a perilous softness in Mab's dreamy grey eyes, which nearly shook Mr. O'Lally's fortitude, even as his ardent though brief look made her turn pale and tremble ; but he was the first to rally. It might be bitter, but that self-subjection should be achieved ; turning a displeased countenance on Doctor Flinn, he said in his most composed tones :

" You surely are not so severe, Doctor Flinn, as to inflict my company for life on any lady ? "

But Doctor Flinn had partaken of a few extra glasses, poured out by Miss Ellen's liberal hand, and he was in a mood to brave even Mr. O'Lally's frowns.

" Now I call that fishing for a compliment," he said, nodding at the master of the house, " and one, too, which Miss Winter cannot afford to give you ; though I have my own fancy that she likes both Ireland and O'Lally's Town."

"Very much, for three months," replied Mab, whose pride the coolness of Mr. O'Lally's tone had wounded; "but oh! not for life!" she added, with a pretty shake of her head. "That would be too long a lease, Doctor Flinn. I am afraid, I really am, that I should feel dull at O'Lally's Town."

Miss Ellen only laughed good-humouredly, but Mr. O'Lally felt offended at Mab's pretty looks of disdain. Like all men of great strength, he had his own signal weaknesses, and one of the greatest was the exaggerated esteem in which he held O'Lally's Town. That any lady whom he might ask to share that dwelling with him should not find it a desirable abode, had never occurred to Mr. O'Lally. He was surprised and irritated at Mab's uncalled-for rejection of that home which, in his pride, he had not thought it possible to offer her; and though that pride forbade him to shew any resentment, and made him say with a smile, "Miss Winter is right—O'Lally's Town would be dull for more than a few weeks," Mab detected his secret annoyance, and from that moment resolved that Mr. O'Lally, if he could not love, should at least have a right to hate her.

Love cannot be passive. When it cannot bless, or be blest, it must torment. Mab was hurt at Mr. O'Lally's coldness. She would not have acknow-

ledged it to herself, but it was so ; a look, a word, might have changed the nature of her sorrow, and turned it into alternatives of happiness or despair ; but Mr. O'Lally had never betrayed himself thoroughly, or at least Mab had never thoroughly understood him. She was convinced of his indifference, and she burned with shame at her own folly. Anger with herself, fear of being detected, resentment of his coldness, all blended into one, and guided her conduct. The whole of that day Mab gave Mr. O'Lally, who was excluded from his sister's room, and remained chiefly below, those tokens of civil aversion which a man must be blind not to perceive, and which he cannot resent.

Mr. O'Lally had no varied knowledge of young girls ; he had experienced nothing but kindness and gentleness from Miss Gardiner's preference, and he concluded that for some unexplained reason he had drawn on himself Miss Winter's displeasure. The thought gave him pain. He did not want her to love him, but he was not so prudent and so cold as to wish for her hatred. He wanted to conquer a passion he judged unwise, but Mab's keen and well-aimed shafts pierced even his strong shield of pride and will, and irritated rather than subdued the feelings he sought to check.

And as she had begun, Mab continued ; her opportunities were frequent, and she lost none. His

patience and gentleness did not disarm her. It may be that the presence of Miss Gardiner, who now and then left the sick-room, did not improve Mab's temper. It was when Mr. O'Lally's partner was with him that he received the least equivocal tokens of Mab's dislike.

One evening, a week after Miss Emily's illness had begun, matters came to a crisis. Mr. O'Lally came home one evening earlier than usual; Mab and Miss Gardiner were sitting together below. Mab was reading, and Miss Gardiner was sewing for poor children. One scarcely raised her eyes from her book, the other welcomed him with a gentle smile—and yet it was on Mab's downcast face that Mr. O'Lally's eyes rested with involuntary regret and longing. It would have been pleasant, even though it was useless, if she would but have looked up, and let her eyes meet his, and smile at him a friendly welcome; but she was deep in her book again, and Mr. O'Lally turned to Annie.

"Are you not well?" he asked, struck with something in her face.

"Oh! quite well," she replied, brightening up; "what should ail me?"

"Nothing, I hope, my dear partner, for I bring important news for you. Pray, stay, Miss Winter," he added, quickly noticing that Mab

was going to rise; "we shall be glad of your advice."

Mab sat down again, and looked profoundly indifferent.

"And pray, Mr. Bonaparte, what may this matter be?" asked Miss Gardiner.

Mr. Bonaparte laughed, and bit his lip, and their eyes met with a conscious gaze. Mab turned her head away, and, with a swelling heart, looked out of the window, near which she sat. And yet what was it to her?—were they not free to love and to marry, and was she?

Yet she listened to them. They were talking of a school Mr. O'Lally wanted to found near their factory. How eagerly Annie entered into his plans! She would pay the teachers—she would give the prizes. And how happy she looked, though happiness was not the prevailing expression of her countenance.

Mab's sunny face, on the contrary, was under a cloud of discontent; the interest she might have taken in Mr. O'Lally's plans was spoiled by Annie's participation in them, and she strove in vain against this jealous and resentful feeling.

"I am afraid our factory scheme has bored you," said Mr. O'Lally, rising, and going up to her.

"Oh! I did not listen to it all," answered Mab.

"It is a pity," he persisted; "we might have benefited by your advice."

"Oh, no!" she quietly replied, looking up in his face; "my advice would have been thoroughly useless. I am as ignorant as I am powerless. I have neither opinions to offer, nor teachers to pay."

Mr. O'Lally reddened, and, bowing calmly, left Mab, and returned to Miss Gardiner. He was scarcely gone when Mab's heart smote her for the needless insolence of her reply. Why could she not be at peace with him? The time would come when they must part. In a few weeks, miles of sea and land would divide her for ever from Mr. O'Lally, and she would see his face no more. It seemed so cruel that it also seemed impossible, and yet it would be so. No doom ever came to the condemned more surely than this would come to her. Ah! why then not leave a gracious image behind? Why be hateful because she could not be loved? Unavailing penitence; that same evening Mab sinned again. Doctor Flinn came in for his favourite game of whist. Mab refused to play. Her head ached, she said.

"A most becoming headache," gallantly replied Doctor Flinn, "but whist will cure it."

Mab shook her languid head, in token of denial. Doctor Flinn persisted:

"Now, let me tempt you. I shall actually forsake Miss Nelly, and be your partner."

Mab smiled, but did not yield to the temptation, which it pleased Doctor Flinn to consider irresistible.

"My aunt will be your partner," she said.

"My dear," cried Miss Lavinia, frightened, "you know I am a shocking hand at whist."

"Not at all, I am sure," insisted Doctor Flinn; "besides, we will allow your niece to advise you, ma'am."

Mr. O'Lally had not meant to play; Mab, by abstaining, compelled him to do so, for Annie was upstairs. She saw the shade of annoyance that crossed his face, and resented it as a personal offence, to be avenged as soon as could be. The game began. Mab sat between her aunt and Mr. O'Lally; her head rested against the back of Miss Lavinia's deep leather chair; exquisitely delicate looked her pale face on that dark background. Involuntarily, perhaps, Mr. O'Lally's look sought it. Those clear outlines, those waves of golden hair, the dark eyelashes resting on the pale cheek, attracted his eyes irresistibly; involuntarily, too, his face expressed tender pity for her suffering. Raising her eyes, Mab caught that look, and, in her sensitive pride, misinterpreted it at once. Did he think she was pining for him?—and did he dare

to pity her? She would soon show him whether she was fond of him or not. She watched her opportunity; it came at length.

Mr. O'Lally turned to Doctor Flinn, and, in doing so, exposed his hand. Mab did not move, but her sidelong look took in every card in one rapid glance. Mr. O'Lally had no trumps, and Miss Lavinia had a tribe of diamonds; he had the leading spades, and Miss Lavinia was convinced they were in Doctor Flinn's hand; but Mab knew better, she silently pointed to every card Miss Lavinia should play, and every card told, and won a trick, and the odd trick gave Doctor Flinn and his partner the game, the last of a long rubber.

"Out!" he shouted in an ecstasy of delight; "out, Miss Livy!"—the familiar appellation slipped out in the joy of the moment. "Those diamonds came in beautifully, and that keeping back of the spades does you infinite credit, Miss Ford. Mr. O'Lally, you owe us five shillings—two and sixpence is your share, madam."

At the mention of money Mab started and reddened, for she felt what she had done. There was no time to lose, and, pulling her aunt's sleeve, she said, in as calm a tone as she could command:

"Aunt, you cannot take that money. I saw

Mr. O'Lally's cards when he turned to speak to Doctor Flinn."

Miss Lavinia's outstretched hand was arrested by surprise, and the two and sixpence remained untouched. Doctor Flinn's eyes opened, Miss Ellen looked amazed, and Mr. O'Lally, who had detected Mab at once, and had watched with keen pain the process of her little cheating, alone showed no surprise.

Doctor Flinn was the first to speak ; he kindly tried to mend matters.

"Oh ! if Miss Winter thought we were playing for love——"

"No, I did not," interrupted Mab, "but I forgot all about the money."

"And you wanted Miss Ford to win—very natural !"

"It was not that," said Mab, who felt impelled to commit herself.

"Miss Winter wanted me to lose," put in Mr. O'Lally smiling. He looked at her as he spoke ; her colour came and went beneath his gaze, but she scorned to deny.

Doctor Flinn returned the money, but Mr. O'Lally pushed it back to him, still smiling.

"Take your two and sixpence, Doctor Flinn," he said ; "we all know how you spend your card-money. Besides, the game is lawfully yours. I

saw Miss Winter look into my cards, and I abetted her."

"Why so?" asked Mab, with a pretty, serpent-like motion of her fair head.

"Because it is a pleasure to lose to Doctor Flinn," composedly replied Mr. O'Lally; "the money he loses is really lost, but that which he wins goes into a poor-box, which, thanks to his kind heart, is rarely full."

Mab turned pale, she felt humbled and penetrated: and Miss Ellen, who, spite her good humour, thought it but right to give this erratic whist-player a lesson, said, with one of her knowing nods,

"Ah! you must take care of our brother, Miss Winter. I warn you that, quiet as he looks, he has a keen eye—nothing escapes him. We find him very inconvenient sometimes; and as to his hearing, it is wonderful."

"Indeed!" said Mab, and she looked up, not at Miss Ellen, but at Mr. O'Lally, with smiling defiance. He returned the look with one of sorrowful gravity. He did not want her love, but he hated the thought of her unmerited aversion, and, less penetrating than his sister had painted him to be, he did not understand the true meaning of Mab's pertinacious ill-will.

In the meanwhile, Miss Lavinia was sorely

troubled. She looked at the two and sixpence still before her, and restlessly wondered what she should do with that awkward half-crown; at length it occurred to her that to ask Doctor Flinn to put the money into his poor-box would be the most proper and convenient way of getting rid of it. Whilst she uttered her request with her usual earnestness, Mab, overwhelmed with shame and keen distress, left her seat, walked to the nearest window, and looked out at the night. A pale soft moon hung in the sky, and touched with tender light the white mists that floated in the air above the garden.

“What can he think of me?” thought Mab, leaning her burning forehead against the cool pane. Her heart was tortured at the mere suspicion of his contempt. She did not know that, anxious to ascertain the cause of her persistent displeasure, Mr. O’Lally had left the group at the table, and was now standing within a few paces of her. Seeing her so deeply absorbed and unconscious of his vicinity, he addressed her:

“Miss Winter, I want you to forgive me, firstly; and secondly, to tell me my sin.”

“Sir!” said Mab, turning round on him haughtily; but her pride vanished when she looked at his face—it was both suppliant and tender. When she saw him standing there before her, beseeching

and respectful, her heart beat, and her head swam, for, to behold him thus bending all his pride before her, and seeking for her favour, was a pleasure too keen not to verge upon pain. Oh! to be loved and wooed, and to be free! "Indeed, Mr. O'Lally, you are too good to trouble yourself about me," she said, with a sudden shyness that became her; "if you knew me better you would not wonder at my ways. I have the most unfortunate temper, that constantly compells me to do the strangest things, and, as you saw this evening, the most wrong."

She left the window as she spoke. Mr. O'Lally stood looking after her, annoyed and disappointed. There was a want of frankness in her reply that struck and pained him, and he got speedy proof of her insincerity. He walked back to the group around the table, and stood behind Miss Lavinia's chair, facing Doctor Flinn, Mab, and Miss Ellen.

"Pray excuse the question I am going to put," suddenly said Doctor Flinn, turning from Mab to Miss Lavinia, "but is not Miss Winter a proof of my proposition, that golden-haired young ladies are decidedly hasty?"

"Indeed, Doctor Flinn," replied Miss Lavinia, with great earnestness, "I am sorry to contradict you, but my niece is a proof of the very reverse.

She has the sweetest temper : it is almost impossible to provoke her."

"But she is capricious," persisted Doctor Flinn, winking knowingly ; "takes sudden dislikes and strong aversions."

"Indeed, no, Doctor Flinn," rather warmly said Miss Lavinia, "Mab is too forgiving, if anything. If you want to know her faults I will tell them to you, though she is here——"

"No, thank you," interrupted Doctor Flinn, "thanks to your unimpeachable testimony, I know Miss Winter's faults : she is deceitful ; she has just been doing all she could to convince Miss Nelly and me that she had a bad temper, and not a very good heart—but we know her now. Excuse the slyness of my cross-examination ; I was bred a lawyer, and a man cannot help being sly who has ever had anything to do with the law. Besides, we Irish are a dreadfully sly people, Miss Ford."

Miss Lavinia, much amazed at being thus taken in, said not one word ; and Mr. O'Lally, still standing behind her chair, thence looked at Mab, reproachfully.

CHAPTER VII.

"It is a hopeless case," thought Mab, with something like despair; "I am destined to become hateful to him, ay, hateful and contemptible too."

"Now, my dear, that was too bad of you," said Miss Ellen, seeming to echo Mab's thoughts; and, coming up, in her friendly way, to the spot where Mab sat apart, "what has our brother done that you should join his enemies?"

Mab looked round: she was alone with Miss Ellen. Doctor Flinn and Mr. O'Lally were gone, and their voices could be heard in the next room in animated conversation; Miss Lavinia, too, had disappeared; she could answer, unchecked by any restraint:

"Enemies! Surely Mr. O'Lally has none?"

"Indeed, then, and he ought to have none," warmly replied Miss Ellen; "but, would you be-

lieve it, Miss Winter," she added, in a tone of amazement, justified by the enormity of the fact, "there is actually a set of men in the country who are making a stand against him!"

"Indeed!" said Mab.

"You may well be surprised. If I had not got it on the unimpeachable authority of Doctor Flinn, I could not believe it. And would you believe it, Miss Winter, that wretched Mr. Briggs is actually at their head! The man who, a week ago, was ready to worship the ground on which our brother trod."

"It is dreadful," ironically said Mab.

"And all about that foolish little bit of a bridge across Shane's river. Now, you know, Miss Winter, that is quite absurd. Our brother has carried everything else before him. The new road went the way he bid it take, just convenient to O'Lally's Town. He stopped the mines that would have ruined the country and his property; and he set up the fisheries that are thriving so wonderfully; he did not allow any other factory to appear, and compete with his—for two cannot stand here—and it was all for the good of the country, of course—for competition is the ruin of trade, and brings down the wages of working men lamentably. Moreover, it was he who had the management of every school and charity—I mean the secular part,

of course—for miles around ; and would you believe it, Miss Winter, the clergy, by whom my brother stood through thick and thin, are deserting him, and have joined with the Briggs Protestant faction, to proclaim our brother a despot and a tyrant, and to say that they will no longer submit to him !”

“ And since when has all this arisen ?” asked Mab.

“ Well, it seems it has been brooding a long time, and that Doctor Flinn has warned our brother ; but I never suspected it till this evening, and I am still all upset and amazed. And what do you think has caused the break out ? Why, that stupid bit of a bridge across Shane’s river.”

“ It is the last drop of water that overflows the full cup,” Mab could not help saying.

But Miss Ellen did not understand her.

“ It is so foolish,” she resumed ; “ for you know, Miss Winter, the country could not stand without our brother. Why, what was it before he set himself to work ?—he has been the making of it ; there is no one dare deny it—no one,” added Miss Ellen, warming with her subject ; “ and Doctor Flinn actually told me to speak to our brother, and bid him be careful. I told him I would as soon dare and take off my head, and bade him do it himself ; and I dare say the audacious man is actually doing it now. I do

wish I could hear what he is saying to our brother."

"But you surely are not afraid of Mr. O'Lally?" almost indignantly said Mab; "he always seems so gentle with you."

"That is just it; I never had a cross word from him, and I could not bear the thought of a displeased look."

Even as she uttered this true definition of love, the door opened, and Mr. O'Lally and Doctor Flinn entered.

"We shall be much better here," said Doctor Flinn, sitting down in a round-backed arm-chair. "Besides, it is more private."

Mab, on hearing this, was going to come forward and show herself; but Miss Ellen checked her, and whispered an entreaty to remain quiet, which Mab would not have heeded, but for Mr. O'Lally's reply to Doctor Flinn's remark.

"The whole world is welcome to hear you."

Doctor Flinn was probably confident that the whole world was not within hearing, for, without giving a look to the remote and gloomy window in which Miss Ellen and Mab were standing, he folded his hands so as to make the tips of his thumbs and fingers meet, and looking at them very attentively, he said, in a slightly hesitating tone:

"Mr. O'Lally, be wise; there is, I repeat, a strong party against you."

Mr. O'Lally, who stood leaning with his back to the high stone mantel-piece, laughed scornfully.

"The Briggs faction—I know all about it."

"No, you don't—you don't," testily said Doctor Flinn; "you have, for the last three years, pretty well ruled this part of Ireland, and your long and unbroken prosperity blinds you; but to tell you the truth, Mr. O'Lally, the yoke has been a heavy one, and that Shane's bridge seems likely to finish it. It really is too much—a bridge built with public money, and leading, as it were, only to your own door."

Mr. O'Lally's blue eyes flashed fire, and his finely cut lips grew white with anger, but he mastered himself, and said, calmly,

"You are plain-spoken, Doctor Flinn—a proof of friendship, I suppose; but I have told you and others again and again, that this bridge will become the leading thoroughfare of the country. Houses will rise where you now see the barren waste. I mean to build at once some handsome cottages and villas along the seashore: they will sell or let rapidly. Give me five years, and I will pay Shane's bridge out of my own pocket, and leave the benefit of it to you."

"So you said about those fisheries, and we have been spending and speculating, and the benefit is yet to come. The country looks better, no doubt;

and you are better, that is certain—but we are devilishly the poorer, my dear fellow."

Mab saw Mr. O'Lally start at the familiar appellation; perhaps it was the surest token he had yet received of his failing power, but he scorned to betray his secret resentment.

"Doctor Flinn," he said, "you may tell the Briggs set that sent you——"

"They did not send me."

"That they must yield."

"They will not."

"Or I must leave the country," pursued Mr. O'Lally, without heeding the interruption; "but before I leave, I charge you to tell them this: when my sisters bought O'Lally's Town the country was only fit for savages."

"We are much obliged to you," drily said Doctor Flinn.

"The population consisted of ignorant poor and apathetic rich, and between both nothing was done. Who built a chapel, a church of stone, I may say, instead of the miserable barn that was a disgrace to a Catholic country?"

"Well," said Doctor Flinn, coughing behind his hand, "we do not deny your services in that case. You gave the land, and set the whole thing going."

"Who built the school?" continued Mr. O'Lally.

"Well, we did, but if it were not for you, why,

we might have let it lie by. We do not deny all that, Mr. O'Lally."

"Who checked those foolish mines that would have drained your pockets? Who promoted the fisheries that will fill them yet? And finally, who established a factory that gave work to hundreds, and banished famine from their homes?"

"You did. But, Mr. O'Lally, that said factory is said to bring you in a handsome penny."

"It brings me in a fortune," unhesitatingly said Mr. O'Lally; "every farthing of which is spent in the country. I declare to you, Doctor Flinn, as God is my judge, that a shilling of that money is not invested in a selfish purpose. If anything I have begun fails, I am the first to be ruined thereby. Why, I have not yet paid back my sisters the money they sank in the purchase of this estate."

"We do not deny all that," said Doctor Flinn, very much embarrassed.

"No—you merely forget it."

"No, we don't, Mr. O'Lally; but there are some who say you have your own purposes to serve—as why should you not?—that you would like a seat in Parliament——"

"And you believe it, Doctor Flinn," said Mr. O'Lally, with much disdain; "a seat in Parliament! —to be a voice among hundreds of voices, to be answerable to constituents and vote at their

bidding—to be last perhaps, instead of being, as I am here, first—I thought you knew me better."

"That is just it," eagerly cried Doctor Flinn, "you will be first, and the yoke is heavy. At first it was all pleasantness; but you have grown used to power, and you think it your due, and we are nothing, and no one."

"A few words more and I cease," said Mr. O'Lally; "remind them of all I have done——"

"I think I would suggest not to do so."

"Remind them of what I have done, and tell them that if they oppose my will in the matter of Shane's bridge, I shall, once for all, meddle no more in their concerns."

"I am afraid that is what they want."

"Let them, if they dare—let them, if they dare!" cried Mr. O'Lally, his voice rising, and all his compressed passion breaking forth; "let them forsake the only man of energy and enterprise amongst them, and sink once more into the Slough of Despond whence I drew them. When the strong arm that supported them is withdrawn, we shall see how they will get on. I know them, and I know myself. Amongst other men I should only be an ordinary man, but with them I am a giant. I tell you they cannot now do without me; and if I leave, it is their ruin."

"We do not want you to leave," said Doctor Flinn, looking uneasy.

"No—of course not; you want me to stay and curry favour, and work at your bidding; but I will be first, or I will be nothing. I will either make this as thriving, as rich, and industrious a part of Ireland as there is, or I will leave it to its fate. Do you think I cannot carry my capital and my energy elsewhere, and raise myself another home?"

"Indeed, O'Lally, we cannot do without you," soothingly said Doctor Flinn—"indeed, we cannot; only we are not children, and you must just let us have a leetle bit of our own way. Now, take the advice of a friend. Marry Annie Gardiner. She is dying to have you, and she has a strong family connexion, and it would set you up again the first among us."

"Miss Gardiner would be very much obliged to you for the suggestion," coldly observed Mr. O'Lally.

"Then indeed she would," bluntly replied Doctor Flinn, "for any one can see which way the wind blows."

"Miss Gardiner has nothing to do with my answer, and that you have received," curtly said Mr. O'Lally.

Doctor Flinn rose, looking dissatisfied enough

with the result of his embassy, and was moving towards the door, when Miss Ellen, unable to keep in any longer, exclaimed from the window,

“Then indeed, Doctor Flinn, I am surprised at you! I am amazed, Doctor Flinn!”

Miss Ellen’s anger could rise no higher than surprise.

“Bless my soul!” exclaimed Doctor Flinn, “I thought you were alone, Mr. O’Lally.”

Mr. O’Lally smiled in a way that showed Mab he had detected her and his sister all along, but he only replied with a careless,

“Oh, no!”

“Yes, I am surprised,” said Miss Ellen, coming forward, and persisting in this form of indignation; “it is not enough for you, Doctor Flinn, to make yourself the mouth-piece of that little foolish Briggs set, but you must even bring in my dear Miss Gardiner’s name.”

“And pray, Miss Nelly, what harm did I say of the young lady?”

“You said, ‘anyone could see which way the wind blew.’ ”

“And that is no slander, surely. No, no, Miss Nelly, you must make out a stronger case against me.”

Whilst Miss Nelly was internally doing her best to make out a stronger case against Doctor Flinn, that shrewd gentleman was making his way out of the room, and once he had set his foot beyond the threshold, he cried out,

“Too late, Miss Nelly—too late now—the courts are closed. We shall hear you to-morrow.”

“I am surprised at Doctor Flinn,” again said Miss Nelly, when, after having shown his visitor out, Mr. O’Lally returned to the sitting-room. He could not help laughing at his sister’s discomfiture, and asked,

“Why so?”

“To talk to you as he did!” she cried, warmly; “I am amazed at the man’s audacity!”

“Yes, it is surprising,” said Mr. O’Lally, with irony, yet not without bitterness too; “he would not have done it two months back.”

“Done it, indeed!—he would have crept into a mouse-hole first.”

“She loves him, and she is luring him on to his ruin,” thought Mab, and an irresistible impulse made her say,

“Why not take a warning—even from Doctor Flinn?”

“Because, when Doctor Flinn warns it is too late,” calmly replied Mr. O’Lally; “and a man

must either stand by what he has done, or fall—there is no medium."

"And yet," persisted Mab, "if it were not too late?"

Mr. O'Lally was walking up and down the room; he stopped before Mab, and looked at her with some surprise; he was not accustomed to such interference from the feminine members of his family, and he had not expected it from Mab. Yet it did not displease him; far from it—his look softened, and he drew nearer to her.

"You are too good," he said, "to care whether it is too late or not. Those for whose welfare I have toiled three years, have but one wish—my downfall."

"Ah! be wise then!—be wise!" urged Mab, beseechingly; "do not give them that triumph!"

"Dear Miss Winter, it would not be wisdom to follow your counsel—it would but be hastening my own ruin."

He spoke almost tenderly; he was moved by the entreaty of Mab's tone, and he well-nigh forgot his sister's presence. Miss Ellen, her first surprise over to hear Mab urge advice on her brother, and Mr. O'Lally actually argue with her concerning the line of conduct he should follow, came up

to them a little jealousy, and thought she too would put in her word.

"Indeed, my dear brother," she said, "there was a good deal of wisdom in what Doctor Flinn said concerning Annie; and, indeed, you could not do a better thing than marry the dear girl."

"Indeed!" said Mr. O'Lally, and he looked at Mab.

But wise is the man who can read a woman's heart, and fathom the secret she is bent on concealing. Mab remained unmoved and cold, neither her looks nor her countenance gave the least clue to her feelings. She wore the reserved mien of one who finds herself unduly brought into some family matter, and who will take part neither way. Mr. O'Lally was slightly disappointed. He did not want to marry Mab, but he did not want her either to be so calmly indifferent. However, he, too, was expert in the art of concealing his feelings, and, turning to his sister, he said, playfully,

"I am surprised at you, Miss Nelly—Miss Nelly, I am amazed!"

Miss Nelly blushed and laughed, and, taking Mab's arm within her own, she bade her brother good night.

"Now, how that Doctor Flinn must have upset me!" she said, stopping short as they stood in the

hall ; " I was actually forgetting dear Emily's message. She goes away to-morrow morning with Annie, for change of air, and she wants to see you this evening. I have not seen her yet, but do not think I am jealous, my dear."

Mab smiled, and declaring herself ready to see Miss Emily, she proceeded alone to that lady's room on the second floor. Both room and tenant were altered since Mab had seen them last. The room was bright and cheerful ; the bed was made and the pillow smooth, and in an arm-chair near a small table sat Miss Emily, pale and mild as ever. She held out her hand to Mab with a cheerful smile, and at once made her sit down by her side.

" I have asked to see you alone," she said gently, " because I know I went on with some strange speeches and deeds whilst I was delirious, and I am afraid I may have frightened you."

" Not much," hesitatingly replied Mab.

" I took you for Mary O'Flaherty," continued Miss Emily, reddening—" for one whom I once loved dearly, but who proved false. As I do not know how I told you the story in my delirium, allow me to tell it you, briefly but plainly, now that I am in my right senses. Mary O'Flaherty was our neighbour for some time. She was very pretty, very good-natured, and, there is no denying it, our

brother liked her. He liked her so well that he determined on marrying her. He wrote to her, asking her to fix the day. I saw the letter—man never wrote more truly nor yet more fondly; and would you believe it, Miss Winter, she never answered him, and, availing herself of a short but severe illness of our dear brother, she went off to America with her brother! She died there six months after her arrival. This is the whole story, and that is why, my dear, I detest the very name of Mary O'Flaherty, much as I once loved her. I tell you all this to explain the unkind speeches I uttered in my delirium. Every word of them was meant for a poor dead girl whom I have long since forgiven."

"I am sorry you have troubled yourself with this explanation," said Mab, quietly, "for it has agitated you."

"Not much," replied Miss Emily, trying to seem calm, "but I wished to tell you this."

She seemed fatigued. Mab left her and went up to Miss Lavinia. She found that lady amazed at her long absence. Mab explained it briefly. She could not bear to talk.

"Robert has not written, and that is what troubles her," thought Miss Ford.

Mab thought of Robert, but she thought of another too. She lay awake that night, as she had

often lain of late, striving with all her might against the feeling that had invaded her heart, calling in gratitude, duty, honour, to her aid, and calling them in vain. The scene she had that evening witnessed was not calculated to banish Mr. O'Lally's image from her mind. This beneficent despot, who had surrendered his ardent youth to so unselfish an ambition, was the very man to charm an imaginative girl's heart. He wanted power ; true—but did he not deserve it, and was not the use he made of it exalted and generous ? Oh ! if his enemies could only read him truly, if they only would check their mean and narrow jealousies, and acknowledge their master ! But they would not. Mr. O'Lally stood on the brink of a precipice, beneath which lay ruin. And he would not yield—he had said so ; Mab knew he would not yield, and, knowing that his ruin was all but certain, she almost wished, in her despair, that he would marry Annie Gardiner, and retrieve, with his own fortunes, that fair edifice of prosperity and hope which he had raised for his country.

“ What matter about me,” bitterly thought Mab ; “ a few weeks more, and I shall see the last of him, and he is sure to forget me.”

“ My dear, what ails you ?” asked Miss Ford,

when Mab rose the next morning. "You look quite unwell."

"I had a bad night, aunt, that is all."

"But it is a great deal, my dear; and do you know, I think you sleep badly in O'Lally's Town. I so often hear you complaining of bad nights."

"It is the air of O'Lally's Town, aunt. I suppose Miss Emily leaves early?"

Miss Emily and Miss Gardiner left after breakfast. Mr. O'Lally accompanied them, but was to return the same day. Miss Ellen saw them depart with a tear in her eye, and stood on the doorstep till the carriage was out of sight; then she re-entered the house with a sigh, and said to Mab, who walked in with her:

"I never can bear to part with Emily, and we never have parted but something dreadful happened to either. The last time I left her, Emily broke one of her front teeth; another time she lost her trunk, in which were her two best silks. In short, it distresses me to let her go. Something will come of it, you may rely upon it."

"She is under good care," said Mab, a little drily.

"You mean Annie. Well, Annie *is* very good, but she is peculiar, too. You never know what she feels, thinks, and does, and I sometimes wonder if she cares for people to whom she says so little."

Yet I know she likes us, loves us, I should say—and Emily is dearly fond of her. I believe she would have her whilst she was ill, and thought it best not to have me; still, will Annie care for her as I would?"

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. O'LALLY came home earlier than he was expected. He came, too, prepared to give his sister and their guests an un hoped-for pleasure—an excursion to Shane's Cascade. It was but a few miles away, yet taking it for granted that the ladies could not bear much fatigue, Mr. O'Lally had procured three ponies, and, taking it for granted, too, that no opposition to his scheme would be raised, he had come home in order to carry it out at once. His quiet will asserted itself, and prevailed. Spite her secret terror of the precipices, Miss Ford yielded, and Mab did not attempt to conceal her delight as they set forth. She felt gentle and good. The afternoon was lovely, and Mr. O'Lally walked by her side.

"I declare that is the Red House!" suddenly cried Miss Ellen.

Mab looked. In a wild glen before them rose a long, low building, dotted with innumerable

windows, and crowned with gaunt chimneys. "How ugly it looks in that lovely solitude!" thought Mab. Do not lament over that desecration of Nature's beauty. A day will come, Mab, when you will lament to see this spot once more a silent waste.

"I do not read admiration in your eyes, Miss Winter," said Mr. O'Lally. "Now, confess you would like this glen better if I had left it as I found it three years back."

"Is yours the only factory near us?" asked Mab, without answering his question.

"The only one in the province, I believe; but though I shall not oppose others later, now I cannot allow any; they would ruin the country—one is as much as it can bear."

"Autocrat," thought Mab.

Yet when they drew nearer—when she beheld the cottages, not mere wretched cabins, hovels scarcely fit for cattle, but homes with a look of comfort about them, and their strip of garden attached to each—when she saw the decently clothed tenants, the air of prosperity and content which already spread over that once desolate valley, her heart swelled, and she thought, "Would there were many such despots in the land!"

And she could not wonder that, spite all Doctor Flinn's warnings, he should seem so confident and

so serene. How could he believe that he, the artificer of so much good, should fall ?

" I put it to you, Miss Winter," said Miss Ellen, to Mab ; " is it not too much that a man like my brother should be interfered with about that little bit of Shane's bridge ? What you have seen to-day is nothing, and he says himself that this factory is only in its infancy ; but you have been in the new chapel, and is it not beautiful ? And then the school, and the road, and the fisheries, and a hundred little matters beside. I am amazed at Doctor Flinn—I am ! "

Mr. O'Lally laughed as he heard her. He seemed very cheerful. Who would have thought that he had had bad news that very morning !

They left the Red House behind. Their path now wound by a rippling little river, which flowed beneath the shade of aspens and willows. Slender grasses and wild flowers edged its banks of clear sand. Numerous winged insects hovered over its tranquil bed, now green as emerald, now blue as the sky it reflected. The rush of wings of some startled bird, the rustling in the grass of some invisible little creature stealing away to some safer hiding-place, the wind passing through the slender boughs of the young trees, were the only sounds that broke on the stillness of the hour.

Mab felt in an exquisite reverie. The coolness

of the air, the low murmur of the flowing river, the soft broken sounds that came from everywhere around her, the steady motion of her little mountain pony, were so many sources of deep though nameless delight.

And pleasantest of all, Mr. O'Lally walked by her, and, answering her questions, told her why this pleasant stream was called Shane's River.

"Shane was the owner of all these lands before the English came. He was a Prince, a warrior; and in his way a great man. He fought bravely against the invaders, and fell in battle before they had conquered. The people gratefully honoured his memory, and though his possessions passed away to strangers, they have, with few exceptions, preserved the name of the popular hero. We have Shane's River, Shane's Cascade, Shane's Castle, and Shane's Country."

Mab looked up and hesitated.

"Shane's Country," he said, anticipating her question, "is the very significant name which has been given to the spot where Shane is reputed to lie buried. It is a beautiful little churchyard in those hills on our left; a few minutes will take us there."

This proposal, on being submitted to Miss Ellen and Miss Lavinia, received their immediate assent. A path, safe and easy, led them to the spot; and

in a few minutes Mr. O'Lally and his guests had reached Shane's Country.

It lay in a hollow of the mountains—a small enclosed field, green with the hillocks of nameless graves. A ruined round tower, covered with ivy, seemed to guard the spot, and a Gothic porch still stood in the centre—the entrance to a once noble abbey, of which every other vestige had long since vanished. Standing near this, Mab surveyed the prospect below, and saw with admiration the seemingly endless line of shore which skirted the green ocean waves, enclosed in their turn by the white, thin, misty circle of the horizon.

An exclamation of dismay uttered by Miss Ellen, and proceeding from the other side of the porch, roused both Mab and Mr. O'Lally.

"My dear brother," she said, agitatedly, "what is this?"

Passing underneath the arch, Mr. O'Lally joined his sister; Mab followed him, but found it hard to understand, at first, what had happened, for Mr. O'Lally bit his lip, and said, with a frown,

"I shall inquire into it, Ellen."

Miss Ellen turned to Miss Ford, and, pointing to a new-made grave, which had been dug near a square monument of some pretensions, she said, plaintively,

"Would you believe, Lavinia, that this grave has been dug three months, and that though it lies close to the monument where our dear mother and her ancestors are buried, and is an infringement on our rights, we cannot ascertain by whom, nor for whom, it has been made. My own belief," added Miss Ellen, with much agitation, "is, that it is meant for one of us."

"Ellen!—my dear Ellen," quickly said her brother, leading her away, "never say that again if you love me!"

Mab could not hear Miss Ellen's reply, but with concern she saw that Miss Lavinia was pale as death.

"Aunt!" she cried.

"I wish we had never come to Ireland," said Miss Lavinia; "it is a dreadful country, Mab!" and she followed Mr. O'Lally and his sister out of the cemetery.

This incident, slight though it was, had thrown a gloom over the party, which Mr. O'Lally vainly endeavoured to dispel. His sister was depressed, Miss Lavinia looked startled, and Mab herself was silent. Their route lay once more by Shane's River; the day and the spot had lost none of their beauty, but the feeling which had made both so delightful an hour back, was gone.

"Now is the time to alight," said Mr. O'Lally.

Mab looked up. They had reached a steep and rocky path shaded by trees, but which no longer wound by the river. It went up a rocky ascent, under the deepest of green shades. Ferns and mosses grew freely in this congenial clime; a narrow thread of water stole down the rocks with a silvery sound. Mab was breathless with delight. The chill air, the verdant gloom, the cool-looking plants, which the sun's hot rays had never withered, fulfilled all her dreams of the homes of Pagan nymphs or of Northern nixe. Here might have dwelt the Roman's ideal, Egeria—here Undine, wearied of human love and its ingratitude, might have found a home of eternal beauty. Snow, ice, and winter could not be here; perpetual spring, and a freshness summer could never invade, surely had made their home in this favoured spot.

The more they ascended, the lovelier grew the sight, for the waters flowed in a fuller stream, and leaped down the rocks with a more rapid bound. At length the Cascade was reached. There it was before them—a sheet of silver bounding among rocks and trees; its shivering summit vanishing in a clear rainbow; its lowest waters flowing away in the gloom of the valley they had just left behind them.

"How do you like Shane's Cascade?" asked Miss Ellen of Mab.

She was leaning on the arm of her brother, for she seemed timid and nervous, and by no means appeared to enjoy the romantic scene.

"I could not have imagined it half so beautiful," replied Mab.

She looked at Mr. O'Lally, but he was absorbed with his sister. Was she cold? did she feel unwell? would she like to go? The truest as well as the kindest solicitude appeared in his questions. At length he suggested brisk motion, to which she assented, and they moved away arm-in-arm along a little path that led round the waterfall. Mab did not follow. She sat down on a cold rock, damp with spray, and felt sad and forsaken.

It is a strange thing to look on at a love in which we have no share—strange, and often bitter. Mab had her own home affections, but she felt very keenly, too keenly, perhaps, that she had no ties of blood. Mr. Ford was not her father, Miss Lavinia was not her aunt, William and Edward were not her brothers. Mr. O'Lally's love for his sisters appeared to her in all its sweetness, in all its holy tenderness, and her heart ached. She stood without that fond and tender circle in which his heart was centred. A vague yearning, a tumultuous jealousy, agitated her. In vain she thought of Robert. His love seemed remote and cold—a troublesome bond in the past, a void for the pre-

sent and the future. With the consciousness of infidelity came the sting of its utter hopelessness. Mr. O'Lally did not care for her—who did? In his heart he despised her; she was no one, a foundling, an outcast, a nameless girl, whom the poorest of O's and Macs felt a right to scorn.

She rose on seeing him return with his sister, and began climbing among the rocks in search of ferns.

“Miss Winter, take care,” said Mr. O'Lally’s voice, in a tone of alarm.

Mab, who stood on a projecting rock, close to the fall of the water, looked round with a secure smile.

“Take care,” urged Mr. O'Lally, leaving his sister’s arm to come up to her, “a life was lost where you now stand.”

Mab shook her head rebelliously, and, without heeding his remonstrative exclamations, she nimbly leaped down from rock to rock. Her footing was sure, and she was fearless—two warrants of safety; she passed by him unharmed, declining, with a cold, careless smile, his proffered hand, and soon stood safe by Miss Lavinia. Her manner was capricious and proud. He had offended her, but how so? Time to perplex himself with these questions was not given him: he heard a low cry, and, hastily turning round, he saw his sister Ellen, whom he

had left for a moment, slip, and fall among the rocks. In a second he was by her, and had raised her.

"Are you hurt?" he cried.

"Yes—I believe my ankle is sprained."

She tried to walk, but the attempt caused her such exquisite pain, that she relinquished it at once. Without more ado Mr. O'Lally lifted his sister up in his arms and carried her swiftly down to the spot where they had left their ponies in charge of Michael, who had come there by appointment. Miss Ellen was placed on the back of hers, supported by her brother, whilst the servant led it slowly along.

"Where are we going?" asked Miss Ellen.

"To Doctor Flinn's. I dare not fatigue you so far as to take you home now."

To Doctor Flinn's they all went: the pleasure of the day marred by this untoward accident.

Doctor Flinn owned a very pleasant cottage, not far from Shane's Country, and which stood on the outskirts of a village of some pretensions. This, however, the cavalcade had no need to enter, and they reached Doctor Flinn's abode with all the privacy they could wish for. A neat servant-girl opened the door, and, without waiting to be announced, Mr. O'Lally, again taking his sister in his arms, carried her in to Miss Flinn's parlour.

"Bless my soul!" cried Miss Flinn, dropping her work, "what has happened?"

"Ellen has sprained her ankle. Is Doctor Flinn within?"

"No, but I am; do you think I cannot prescribe for a sprained ankle?"

The chance of prescribing for Miss Ellen was not left to Miss Flinn, for, even as she spoke, her brother's voice was heard in the hall. He came in lively and bustling, and, on learning the state of the case, said, in a loud clear voice:

"It is nothing, and it will be nothing, but Miss Ellen must not stir—that's all—and not to stir, she must remain here."

Miss Ellen looked blank, and even Mr. O'Lally seemed annoyed; but Doctor Flinn, on examining the sprained ankle, maintained his first decree.

"Do not trouble about us, Ellen, my dear," said Miss Lavinia, "we shall go back to O'Lally's Town, and do without you for a few days."

"I suppose you must," disconsolately replied Miss Ellen; "but what a pity dear Emily is away!"

But though the return to O'Lally's Town was perforce agreed upon, Mr. O'Lally could not accompany the two ladies, for Doctor Flinn informed him that he was wanted on important business a few miles hence.

"I am sure Miss Ford and Miss Winter will excuse our brother," pleaded Miss Ellen.

"Indeed we will," replied Miss Lavinia, nervously; "Michael shall see us home."

"But why run away?" asked Miss Flinn; "there is room for you here."

Doctor Flinn seconded the hospitable invitation; but Miss Lavinia felt shy and uncomfortable in this strange house, and was even in some hurry to leave it. Michael saw them home, as had been agreed; and thus unpleasantly ended the excursion to Shane's Cascade.

"I feel very miserable," said Miss Lavinia, when they reached O'Lally's Town. "That open grave is haunting me. I know you did not mean it, but it was very unfortunate you skipped among those rocks; and I wish, I really did, we had never come to Ireland. My head aches so, that it is quite distracting."

Mab advised her aunt to go to bed. But Miss Lavinia could not make up her mind to move. She sat disconsolately in the large sitting-room below, saying her head ached, and lamenting her troubles, but she did not stir. Mab again advised repose; and, after some hesitation, Miss Lavinia complied with the advice. But when she was upstairs and in bed, she could not rest. She heard noises be-

low, she said, and she bade Mab go down and see if Mr. O'Lally were coming.

Mab resisted, but her aunt's restlessness increased, and she at length yielded. She went downstairs, and, leaving the house, walked down to the shore. The day was well-nigh spent; the sky was clear and blue, and the sun was bending towards the farthest edge of the vast green sea. Softly, almost languidly, the waves met the yellow sand of the beach, and rolled back again to their mighty bed. Heavenly peace filled heaven and earth, and Mab's heart felt ready to break. Far as she might look she could see no token of his coming; but he would come, not merely this evening, but again and again. He had said within her hearing that he would never leave O'Lally's Town. This region was his home for ever. Those wild heathy mountains, that solitary shore and broad ocean, would meet his gaze for days and years to come. Mab thought them as blest as she was miserable. Separation, speedy and irrevocable, lay before her; and beyond that again a future so desolate, that she shrank to contemplate it. Oh! if escape were but possible; if she were but beloved and free to love, what a happy destiny to live in that wild Irish nook, and never leave it! The sullen Atlantic might shut her out from other lands—mountain

and heath might enclose her home—it would still be home, and be blest.

Mr. O'Lally had not appeared, and the red round sun was sinking, shorn of rays, a ball of fire, in the deepening blue of the sea. Mab turned back towards the house, and went up to her aunt's room.

"Is he coming?" eagerly asked Miss Lavinia.

"No, aunt; I did not even get a sight of him."

"I wish he would come—don't you think you hear him below?"

"No, aunt; you hear the servants."

"You always are so sure of everything! Now, I feel certain that Mr. O'Lally will come in unawares, and that you will miss him, and I shall not know how Ellen is."

"I shall leave a message with the servants, aunt."

"There it is again! You are always for leaving it to the servants, as if they ever minded those things! Now, what is to prevent you from sitting down below, and waiting for Mr. O'Lally yourself. That way I shall be sure that you cannot miss him."

Mab was surprised at her aunt's pertinacity, and attempted to resist it; but she only made Miss Ford uncomfortable and restless, and after a while she yielded and went downstairs.

Very large and lonely seemed the vacant sitting-room to Mab. The lamp on the table shed a white circle of light, beyond which all was vague darkness. The evening was still, the wind moaned around the old house, and Mab felt both superstitious and unhappy. The thoughts which had haunted her on the seashore were not with her then : passion was mute, and vain wishes had fled. No, as Mab looked round that solitary room—as she remembered Miss Emily's illness, and thought of the disasters of the day, she wondered if her aunt's presentiments were visionary, or only too real. “Is there some evil fortune attending me?” she asked of herself, with some bitterness ; “must I bring trouble and grief to every one connected with Mr. O'Lally—and shall I perhaps end with him ?”

She tried to banish the thought. She took up a book that lay on the table, and attempted to read. It was *Froissart*, brought and left there by Mr. O'Lally. But chivalry had lost her charms—neither knightly deed nor lady-love could make Mab forget that ill-fated day. Besides, the deep, unearthly stillness of the house haunted her. She longed to hear a voice, a step, a closing or an opening door. Her wish was gratified ; a loud ring announced Mr. O'Lally's return ; the house grew alive with sounds ; the door was opened, and, in a

few minutes, he entered the sitting-room, attracted by the light he saw burning there.

Mab was bending over her book—her cheek lay on her hand—her elbow rested on the table—her face was so bent that Mr. O'Lally could not see it; he could only see the gentle outlines of her clear forehead, and the thick waves of her golden hair.

“Yes,” he thought, as the temptation rose before him in all its sweetness, “it would be very pleasant to have her here waiting for me evening after evening; to get her welcome after the long anxious watch, the weary longing for my return; it would be very pleasant, but *cui bono*—when, even if she would, I would not.”

Perhaps his countenance expressed more than he guessed of those feelings, for Mab rose and inquired after Miss Ellen, with a flush on her cheek.

“His sister was well,” he said, “and would soon return.” He stood between Mab and the door, and he did not let her pass at once.

“Miss Winter,” he said, “you must often think me rude. Excuse me—it is involuntary. But you know, for others have told you, how great is the likeness you bear to Miss O’Flaherty. She was our neighbour, and we knew her well.”

"Is the likeness so great?" asked Mab, with a smile of some scorn.

"Wonderful! And yet," he added, bending his eyes on her face, "what a difference!"

Mab could not help understanding the meaning of that look. It expressed admiration—no more, perhaps—but it expressed that, respectful and courteous—such as he could give, and she could receive, but warm enough to make her heart beat, and her look fall before his.

"Mab!—Mab!" said an anxious voice on the staircase.

It was Miss Lavinia, who had risen, and was calling her niece in querulous tones. Blushing and ashamed at having lingered so long, Mab left the room, without giving Mr. O'Lally another look. He closed the door after her, and, as he did so, he could not help hearing Miss Lavinia say, pettishly,

"What can you have been doing there with Mr. O'Lally all this time?"

"This will never do," he thought, vexed with his own weakness. He took up Froissart, but no more than Mab could he read; Mab's rosy face ever floated between him and the black-letter page—a vision of loveliness and youth. He remembered the girlish voice, he saw the golden hair, he felt the charm of the wayward ways—now sweet

as honey, now petulant and wilful as a child's—and he almost wished he were less master of his own passions.

"A weaker man would love, and probably win her," he thought; "why must not I?"

The answer came prompt and clear: he was strong, and must pay the noble cost of strength—self-subjection. Judgment did not approve this passion.

"And it shall not prevail," thought Mr. O'Lally, again taking up Froissart.

Boast not too much, nor yet too soon—you are strong, it is true, but remember that even the strong have their hours of weakness.

CHAPTER IX.

THERE was not for miles around a pleasanter and a more comfortable parlour than Miss Flinn's. She took great pride in it, and in its oak-paneled walls, dark and glossy, set off by the gay flowers of the carpet and the crimson damask chairs. The prospect which the broad window of this parlour commanded was part of its beauty, in Miss Flinn's opinion. It was both bright and romantic, for it began with a garden full of flowers and ended with a horizon of purple hills. By that window the three-fourths of Miss Flinn's life were spent. Here she sewed, and here she read her favourite books, and "fed her mind through her eyes," as she said herself; and here, conceiving that sun and air were the best panacea for a sprained ankle, she had Miss Ellen brought down and laid on a couch, to which she generously surrendered the whole window.

On this couch, therefore, and in this parlour, Miss Ellen was lying contentedly enough the day that followed the unlucky excursion to Shane's Cascade, when her happy, or at least resigned, mood was broken by her perverse hostess. They were alone, it was long past noon, but the day was still warm and bright, when, suddenly putting down her work, Miss Flinn exclaimed,

"What a pretty girl Miss Winter is! So fair and rosy; and how much that brother of yours seems to admire her!"

"God forbid!" emphatically exclaimed Mr. O'Lally's sister.

Miss Flinn laughed.

"Why, where's the harm?" she asked.

"It would break Emily's heart. Indeed it would, Miss Flinn."

"Not a bit of it, Miss Nelly. Why should it? A man may think a girl pretty and stop there."

"Ah! but if our brother did not stop there?—and yet you are right enough. He is an O'Lally, and he would never do it."

"Well, thank heaven," said Miss Flinn, with great philosophy, "I am Bridget Flinn, and my brother says ours is a great family—but, thank heaven, I say again, *I* never cared one pin about it. Men and women are what God made

them, Miss Nelly, and the rest is but miserable nonsense—O'Lally and all.”

Miss Flinn was privileged, yet Miss Ellen winced under so heretical a speech.

“I value your brother more for being what he is,” continued Miss Flinn, “than for his blood; besides, you know, Miss Ellen, some people say his father could scarcely have proved his descent.”

“Then indeed, and indeed, they speak falsely!” angrily interrupted Miss Ellen; “and it is well Emily does not hear you. But there never was a truer O'Lally than our brother.”

“He is better than an O'Lally,” persisted the obstinate Miss Flinn; “he is a remarkable man, and on a broader field he would have been a great one. He used to lead my brother, Doctor Flinn, by the nose, and Doctor Flinn still swears by him. Don't I know how he got round that obstinate old Briggs, and can't I remember how he used to get round me as a boy, when it was all ‘Miss Flinn,’ and ‘Biddy, my dear?’ I tell you he was born to rule men and to wheedle women, and it is a mercy he uses the latter part of his power so little.”

“Our brother is a man of principle,” proudly said Miss Ellen.

“Very true,” nodded Miss Flinn; “and yet I am not sure there is no mischief brewing between him and that rosy little Miss Winter.”

"Do not say that, for God's sake!" agitatedly cried Miss Ellen, clasping her hands; "think of Annie—dear Annie Gardiner, who adores him!"

"Then, dear Annie is a fool," drily said Miss Flinn; "for he does not adore her. Why should he? No—no, Miss Gardiner cannot stand by Miss Winter—it is out of the question."

Miss Ellen looked sorely distressed. Miss Flinn pitilessly continued:

"I confess I never liked that Annie. She is self-opinionated, and keeps her sweetness for the men—always a bad sign. You think she loves you—bless you, it is all for your brother! Has she a woman for her friend?—Not one—and she wants none—she has no heart."

"I am sure she is fond of us," stoutly said Miss Ellen.

Miss Flinn shook her head and said again,

"I am sure she ought to be; but what is your objection to that pretty little Miss Winter?"

"She is a foundling, and she is poor."

"There it is!—birth and money. Well, watch her close, then; for, unless I am mistaken, she is distractedly fond of your brother."

"And he!—he!" gasped Miss Ellen, thoroughly frightened.

"I don't think him quite safe."

Again Miss Ellen clasped her hands in unutterable dismay.

"The deceitful little creature!" she cried; "the little cheat!"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Miss Flinn. "It is you, dear Miss Nelly, you and Miss Emily, who have acted like a pair of geese. What! you have got an irresistible brother, handsome and fascinating, and you ask a young and pretty girl to your house! I would not trust any man—not even Doctor Flinn—with a plain one."

"But Annie is handsome, and he does not care for her," piteously said Miss Nelly.

"The very reason why he should care for another, and especially for a newer one. He has known Miss Gardiner all his life, and she *is* monotonous; Miss Winter is not."

"What shall I do?" moaned Miss Ellen; "he is alone in the house with her, and I am kept here for ever so long."

"Don't fidget. I am pretty sure her aunt, who is not smitten with Mr. O'Lally, will watch her close enough. She scarcely took her eyes off of her yesterday. I have a strong fancy that she is saving up Mab, as she calls her, for that nephew of hers who is in Australia, as you told me."

Miss Ellen brightened up at the idea.

"I wish she would," she said eagerly, "it would

be just the thing. Now, suppose I were to write a little friendly note to Miss Lavinia, about her health and all that, and end with a postscript about her nephew and Miss Winter, and what a desirable thing it would be."

Miss Flinn's work, which she had resumed, dropped on her lap, and her look fell with deep compassion on Miss Ellen's reclining figure.

"Simple you were born, and simple you will die," she said, in a tone of contemptuous pity; "there is no putting it into you. Miss Emily is keener; but her head is not quite right either. A poor set!—a poor lot!"

Miss Ellen was not so much annoyed as disappointed to find her simple scheme thus rejected; but though she did not persist in it, a little reflection convincing her it was rather too transparent, she hit on another plan, which, lest it should be ruthlessly demolished by Miss Flinn, she did not impart to that lady, and for which she patiently awaited her brother's arrival. He came early. Miss Flinn welcomed him with the cordial friendship and open admiration which he ever received from that frank lady.

"I should have liked such a brother as you, Mr. O'Lally," she said, as he sat by his sister, and bent with caressing tenderness over her reclining face; "a brother like you is better and more convenient

than a lover: in the first place, he lasts longer; in the second, he is not so troublesome."

Mr. O'Lally raised his laughing blue eyes, and looked with a smile at Miss Flinn:

"What is your objection to Doctor Flinn?"

"Now, don't be conceited, Mr. O'Lally. Doctor Flinn is fully as good as you are, and wears admirably, and I would not change a hair of his head; but for all that, I should have liked a brother like you—young, handsome, gay, and brilliant, and especially fond of me. A brother who would come in with a smile and a kiss, who would buy me becoming dresses, and whom I, being older and graver, could pet and indulge. Now, you know there is no petting Doctor Flinn."

"Pet me, Miss Flinn," said Mr. O'Lally, with a light laugh.

"Yes, laugh away at old Miss Flinn," she answered, with a half sigh; "you have your own sisters, and I have been talking nonsense, as I always do when you are here; but indeed, Mr. O'Lally——"

Here Miss Flinn was interrupted by a servant, who mysteriously informed her that she was wanted; upon which she rose, and rather hastily left the room.

"I wonder what Doctor Flinn thinks of that," said Mr. O'Lally, as the door closed upon her.

"Surely Doctor Flinn is not jealous."

"You do not suppose I am thinking of the nonsense with which Miss Flinn has been gratifying us? No—I mean the errand on which she has been summoned."

Miss Ellen looked puzzled.

"Why, Nelly, don't you know Miss Flinn prescribes on her own account, and that she has actually cured a child her brother had given up! Woe betide her when Doctor Flinn learns that this is not a chance success, but part of a system—of a regular competition for skill and empire."

"Miss Flinn is a very daring woman!" said Miss Ellen, amazed; "how can she run such a risk?"

"How, indeed!" laughingly replied Mr. O'Lally; "I wish, though, she would cure and give me back my sister."

"Oh! I am getting better. Tell Lavinia so. I thought I should see her this morning."

"Miss Ford had a bad headache last night. So at least Miss Winter told me."

On hearing Mab's name, Miss Ellen could scarcely disguise her uneasiness; and eagerly plunged into the subject uppermost in her thoughts.

"By the way," she exclaimed, "how is Miss Winter?"

"Well, I believe."

"Do you know," resumed Miss Ellen, with her most serious look, "I have been thinking how well she would do for Miss Flinn's cousin—James Flinn."

Mr. O'Lally laughed outright.

"What makes you so matrimonial to-day, Nelly?" he asked. "Now, tell the truth—it is not about either James Flinn, or Miss Winter, you are troubling yourself—but about your brother."

"My dear brother, I hope you are not vexed," said Miss Ellen, much disconcerted; "it is all Miss Flinn's doing. She would have it that you and Miss Winter were distractedly—no, I mean that you—that Mab"—in her confusion Miss Ellen thought it the wisest plan to stop short and say no more.

Mr. O'Lally's pale face flushed; it might be with displeasure, it might be with another feeling, but he said, composedly enough:

"Miss Flinn is apt to imagine strange things. Good-bye, Nelly, God bless you!"

He stooped, and kissed her.

"There is a storm coming on," said Miss Ellen, glancing uneasily at the sky, which bent dark and threatening above the purple mountains; "wait until it is over."

"I shall be home before it breaks."

Mr. O'Lally's will was law; his sister did not

dare to insist any further. He passed through the garden to leave the house, and leaning against the low wooden gate, he found Miss Flinn, who had just parted from a poor woman. He lightly laid his hand on her shoulder, and looked laughingly in her brown face :

“ How is your patient ? ” he asked.

She could not repress a little start, but scorning to betray her secret annoyance, she said, calmly :

“ My patients always do well, Mr. O’Lally ; for when I cannot cure, I let them alone.”

“ Not always ; what have you been saying to Nelly ? ”

“ What has she told you ? ” cautiously asked Miss Flinn.

He would not answer. They exchanged a quick, half-jesting, half-mistrustful look.

“ The wise woman ! ” said Miss Flinn, with a reprobating shake of the head ; “ I ought to have known her better.”

“ Say you ought to have known me better, Miss Biddy.”

Miss Biddy raised her hand, and shaded her eyes. She looked deep into his, and smiled.

“ Go your ways,” she said ; “ go your ways. You are not the first man whose pride has had a fall, Mr. O’Lally.”

“ Now what does that speech deserve ? ”

"Pay me out the next time you come—that is to say, if you can."

Mr. O'Lally was struck with her earnestness, and became suddenly grave.

"Miss Flinn," he said, knitting his arched eyebrows with the most serious look, "speak frankly: have you noticed in my behaviour to that young girl—who is and must ever be a stranger to me—anything which the nicest honour could question?"

"No, and indeed no!" warmly replied Miss Flinn; "but—"

"But," he repeated after her.

"But you admire her, of course."

He was silent.

"Well, then, take care—that is all."

Mr. O'Lally turned away with a smile, both careless and secure.

Little did Mr. O'Lally care for Miss Flinn's boasting, or for her warning, but his sister's broken words haunted him; yes—he, too, had suspected Mab's preference, but suspicion had never ripened into certainty. And yet it might be. He might be loved by that proud heart, which knew so well how to put on the garb of aversion. He was sure of Annie's affection, and it did not move him; but the thought of Mab's, which he still doubted, stirred his blood, and thrilled through his very heart.

He stopped short, surprised and indignant at the sway this thought held over him. "You have never been conquered yet," said pride; "will you be conquered now? Shall a girl's face prevail over your settled will, and that, too, when fortune's darkest frowns warn you that evil is at hand?" But as he walked on, another and a softer voice replied—"It is not a girl's face that has won you. Beauty is a flower that grows on many a tree; but if you care for that blossom only, it is that its sweetness mates best with your sense. Her very faults and errors are more congenial to you than the virtues of others. Be wise; love has its day, and—alas! it has but one."

But when was man's ambition conquered by the pleadings of this speaker? Mr. O'Lally frowned, and set his heart, as he remembered who and what Mab was. He might have forgotten easily that she was poor, for though he knew the value of money, he was not mercenary; but he could not—and he would not forget, that to marry her as matters stood with him now, might be the loss of his trembling *prestige*, the ruin of his last hopes. He would not give his enemies that hold over him—no; come what would, they should not taunt this would-be regenerator—as a love-sick youth, ready to cast all his pride at the feet of a nameless, of a worse than nameless girl! Later, when he was

strong, when their necks were broken to the yoke, he might prove his power, and their submission, by setting Mab above them all ; but now he would keep his own counsel, and bide his time.

“ Alas ! it may be too late when you are strong,” whispered pleadingly the softer voice, which had already spoken ; “ remember that time is not man’s, that it belongs to God alone.”

Well, it would be hard to lose her. Mr. O’Lally confessed it to himself ; it would be hard to learn that Mab had become another man’s wife ; but still he could bear it, for he was strong, and the strong who rule this world rule their own hearts first of all. In this mood he walked on, defiant of fate and love, as of the storm that brooded in the sullen sky before him. A black rim met the purple plain where the mountains did not break the horizon ; all nature was quiet, silent, and threatening.

At length the thunder woke ; lightning flashed across the sky ; large drops of rain began to fall. In a few minutes he was wet through. O’Lally’s Town was within sight, but it was too late to speed on ; and Mr. O’Lally, without hurrying, walked leisurely by the shore, watching the sea-birds swooping above the waves for their prey, as the hawk hovers above fields of corn ! “ Everywhere the weak are the prey of the strong,” he

thought ; “everywhere the same pitiless law of remorseless strength prevails.”

His eyes were bent ; a light sound made him raise them : he stopped with some surprise, for a woman’s figure had suddenly crossed his path. She threw back the hood of her cloak, and it disclosed Mab’s features. She looked wild and pale, and her drenched garments showed she had been out in all the rain.

“What has happened ?” cried Mr. O’Lally ; “but wait, first come here.” He seized her hand and led her swiftly to a projection of the rocks ; it gave a shelter which the slanting rain could not reach, and which screened them both. He had not released Mab’s hand, and it felt cold as ice, and shook in his clasp like an aspen leaf.

“What is it ?” he said again.

“My aunt is ill,” replied Mab, faintly.

“Then I shall go myself for Doctor Flinn.”

Mab stretched out the hand he had dropped and detained him.

“Doctor Flinn has been ; he called to tell us how Miss Ellen was going on.”

“Then what brings you out, Miss Winter ?” asked Mr. O’Lally.

Mab gasped for breath, but tightening her hands on her bosom, she said, with sufficient firmness :

"I came to meet you, Mr. O'Lally. My aunt sent me," she added; "Doctor Flinn acknowledged to her that he dreaded a contagious fever, and to me that, if so, that fever was—Typhus."

"I am sorry to hear it," replied Mr. O'Lally.
"Let us go in."

Mab's calmness forsook her at once.

"You must not enter the house—you must not!" she cried. "Whatever happens, *you* must not suffer."

Mr. O'Lally bent his keen eyes on her face. He felt a strange wish to try and torment her—to make her break through every restraint of shame and pride, and know if Miss Flinn had spoken truly.

"Surely, Miss Winter," he said, half smiling, "you would not bid me shrink from a personal danger, and forsake my sister's guest in my sister's house."

"But it will serve no end. Oh! be persuaded," she implored. "Remember how fatal we have been to you and yours. One sister, the day I arrived, the other yesterday, suffered through me. Do not, I entreat, add to that load of remorse and grief, what would be beyond it all. Out of pity to them—to us—do not—do not!"

Mr. O'Lally, still looking at Mab, did not answer. She thought he was yielding, and renewed her entreaties with greater ardour.

"Do not," she said; "common prudence forbids it. You must yield, for the sake of your sisters—you must."

"I cannot," said Mr. O'Lally, gently, but firmly. "You will not!" she cried, distractedly.

"I cannot."

Before he could guess her intention, Mab had sunk on the ground at his feet.

"I will not rise," she cried, in a voice full of anguish, "until you have yielded. God help me if you do not, if to the trouble and the grief I have already inflicted on your sisters, I add *your* danger—if I help to destroy you, their darling, their life, and their pride. Oh! Mr. O'Lally, have mercy upon me—if you have none on yourself—save me from that pang and that agony."

Her hands clasped his garments with nervous emotion, her upraised eyes sought his with an imploring gaze—her looks, her face, breathed entreaty and despair, and something more than she knew, something which Mr. O'Lally read there with tumultuous emotion.

Never had love and pride quaffed so deep a draught of content in Mr. O'Lally's heart as they did then. Mab was no more the dangerous likeness of a dead love, which had proved weak and faithless—she was herself, the proud and perverse young beauty, whom he had neither courted nor

sought to win, and who had poured upon him the full tide of her indifference and her scorn. And now she was kneeling, kneeling to him and praying, her long guarded secret in her face! With all his self-control and strength, Mr. O'Lally was an imaginative man—he was also a man of quick passions, which he had never indulged. The conviction of Mab's desperate love for him passed like flame through his whole being; he forgot her nameless birth, and its shame, he only remembered her loveliness and her youth. He gave himself no time for thought or reflection. His face burned with triumph and joy, and, raising Mab, he looked at her, flushed and ardent.

Her secret was gone; it was hers, still, that morning, and now it was gone for ever, and in the power of the last being that should have known it. A moan of despair passed her lips, and, hiding her burning face in her hands, she stood mute and weeping before him.

He first broke silence.

“Mary, for God’s sake speak!—Miss Winter, I mean—no, Mary, my second Mary, better, dearer, far, than the first, speak to me—I know you love me, but tell me it is true.”

He removed her hands from her face, but Mab was too much frightened at his tone to raise her downcast eyes.

"Look at me," he entreated—"at least look at me."

Mab had never thought to be thus spoken to by him, in a tone so suppliant and so tender. Her heart beat so fast that she could scarcely breathe—she felt overpowered with happiness and joy. She, too, forgot—she forgot the past and its ties, the present and its cares—she only felt beloved, and looked up to read in his face the same story he had read in hers.

There was a transport in that first moment which made both forget all else in life, as they had already forgotten the thunder and the storm in the sky above. Mab was the first to waken from that dream of delight; she thought of Robert, and remembered her bonds with mingled terror and abhorrence.

"God help me!" she said.

Mr. O'Lally looked down at her with a fond smile.

"The storm will soon be over," he said.

The storm, indeed! Mab looked up at the sky, sullen and black, with forked lightning passing through it, and every cloud pregnant with a thunderclap; and what were the storms of the elements—what was their wildest fury—to the misery of her aching heart? And yet, what strange happiness blended with all her woe—how troubled a joy mingled with her despair!

"God help me!" she said again.

He thought she feared for him—feared the danger at O'Lally's Town.

"Be not afraid," he said, fondly drawing her towards him, "nothing can happen to either of us—we are safe from all harm."

"Oh! if one could only die!" thought Mab, letting her head sink against his shoulder; "if that could be the end of it."

But life, terrible life—its duties, and its hateful bonds—were all before her.

"The rain has ceased," said Mr. O'Lally; "you are wet, very wet, I am afraid. We must make our way to O'Lally's Town—that dull O'Lally's Town," he added, half-smiling.

Mab knew all he meant—that home which she had slighted in her pride, was now to be hers, at least in his thoughts, because it was his. He dreamed of no separation—of nothing that could divide them.

"Have mercy on me!" she said, faintly.

Mr. O'Lally looked amazed and doubtful.

"I surely have not offended you?" he said.

"Oh, no!—offended me!—oh, no! But still, have pity on me!"

Her meaning became more obscure, yet it was plain something troubled her.

Mr. O'Lally bent on her a look that seemed to read her very soul.

"You love me," he said, quietly; "I have not been deceived—I am sure of it—then, what is it?"

Here was the time for rescue, for a full confession, or for denial. Now, could Mab have told him all, or declared that he had been deceived—that she did not love him, and loved another, to whom she was bound in honour? But neither that sickening acknowledgment nor that falsehood could be uttered—but one truth broke from her lips, strong and triumphant.

"No," she said, with the energy of despair, "no, you have not been mistaken. I do love you with my whole heart and soul—better than life a thousand times—but—but—for all that, have mercy on me!"

Her words now bore but one meaning in his ear—his danger. He smiled, and pressing her to his heart, with a sudden transport, wakened by a confession so daring and so tender, he said fervently,

"If I had not loved you before I must love you now! The world holds not another girl like you—not one—not one!"

Mab's head sank on her bosom—her courage failed her. She heard his words of love and fond-

ness, she submitted to his tenderness with a sort of apathy.

"Perhaps it is I shall die of aunty's fever," she thought, with something like hope; and no longer resisting his entreaties, she allowed him to assist her over to the road, where the sand had drunk in the rain.

The sky was clear, the sun shone on the sea, the storm was over, and Mr. O'Lally's eyes danced with delight.

Mab, too, was happy; her resolve was taken. She had stifled the last cry of conscience—she would be his wife, no matter at what cost.

"Robert will survive my loss," she thought; "besides, who knows, perhaps I shall die of aunty's fever."

Oh! if he could have read the meaning of that strange look of love and woe she cast upon him as they crossed the threshold of O'Lally's Town, what a wakening there would have been in his heart.

CHAPTER X.

"How long you have been gone!" moaned Miss Lavinia, when Mab softly entered the room.

Mab looked at the watch on the toilet-table.

"Only three-quarters of an hour, aunt." And she thought, as she said it,

"My whole life changed in three-quarters of an hour!"

"It seemed very long," sighed Miss Lavinia, turning restlessly in her bed; "why did you go out?"

"To meet Mr. O'Lally, aunt."

"Mab, it is odd. Why should you go and meet Mr. O'Lally—it is very odd!"

Mab did not answer. It was at her aunt's request that she had gone, and it was useless to argue with her, ill as she was.

"I am afraid," pursued Miss Lavinia, "I really am, that you like Mr. O'Lally too much."

"Aunt!" cried Mab, much startled.

"I thought so from the first," resumed Miss Lavinia, in a heavy tone. "You looked at each other in such a strange way on that first evening, it was quite odd. When he was not looking at you, you were looking at him, and so on—it was quite tiresome."

Alas! all that Mab felt on hearing this was, "He loved me from the first, then!" Memory rapidly went over the last few days, and carefully gleaned every token. Ay, Miss Lavinia spoke truly; Mab could not doubt it, she had been beloved even in those early moments of their acquaintance, when he seemed so distant and so cold.

"I do not think, I really do not, that Robert would approve of it," continued Miss Lavinia; "but you seem to me never to think of poor Robert now."

Mab turned red and pale. Her conscience smote her keenly, and yet, with all her remorse and shame, what deep joy it was to think of Mr. O'Lally! And he loved her—she was sure of it. She had read it in his eyes, in language which no woman can doubt, and which his uprightness and proud honour rendered gospel truth. Why could she not tell Miss Lavinia? But the shock of knowing her darling Robert betrayed for Mr O'Lally,

would be too great. Compelled by prudence to passive deceit, Mab silently sat down in a deep arm-chair by her aunt's bed-side.

"Poor child," softly said Miss Lavinia, "how unkind I am, as if you did not love dear old Robert as much as I do!—but, you see, his last words were, 'Aunt! take care of Mab for me!'"

This unmerited praise was harder to bear than the too well-deserved reproaches. And long, feverish, and painful was the night, painful, yet inexpressibly sweet, for Mr. O'Lally sat in the next room, ready to come on her first call, and Mab knew it. Miss Ford long moaned with pain, then fell into a heavy torpor. Mab sat by her, giving her a drink now and then, till dawn broke in the sky. She then gently opened the window farthest from her aunt's bed, and refreshed her languid head with the cool morning air. The grey clouds softly melted away from the dappled sky, behind them shone pale gold, then burning red, then the sun rose, nature awoke, there was a sound of twittering birds, a murmur of all living creatures in the air, and Miss Lavinia's voice moaned drearily:

"Oh! Mab, why are you always leaving me?
Who is that?"

It was Honour, and, behind her, Doctor Flinn, and a middle-aged woman in black, a nurse, whom

he had promised to bring to help Mab when he had called on the preceding day.

Miss Lavinia roused herself at once.

"Doctor Flinn," she said, "do you know, I think you were mistaken yesterday; I really do not believe I have got a dangerous fever."

"I said contagious," corrected Doctor Flinn—"not dangerous, I hope."

"And I do not think there was any necessity to be frightened about Mr. O'Lally."

"I hope not," composedly answered Doctor Flinn. "And how are you to-day, ma'am?"

"This morning, you mean."

"This morning, quite right. How are you this morning, Miss Ford?"

"I want to leave Ireland," replied Miss Lavinia, with much energy; "I hate that open grave."

Doctor Flinn put a few questions, soothed Miss Lavinia, and, with kind words of encouragement to Mab, he withdrew.

"Perhaps I shall call in again this evening," he carelessly said at the door. Mab felt sure that he would; but she showed no uneasiness, and pressed him with no questions—it was useless, and her own forebodings were of the gloomiest. Unable to control her feelings, she allowed the nurse, who had already begun her duties, to attend on her aunt, and, going to the open window, she again

looked out, and let her tears fall freely. Steps on the gravelled paths of the garden below roused her. She saw Mr. O'Lally and Doctor Flinn talking together, and Mr. O'Lally's face was full of concern. They parted, and he looked up and saw her. He smiled, beckoning her to come down: her whole heart flew towards him in fond obedience; at once she slipped out of the room, and, in a few seconds, she had joined him in the garden.

"What did Doctor Flinn say to you?" was her first breathless question.

"He acknowledged a mistake: Miss Ford has not got Typhus, the symptoms have changed."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Mab, with fervent gratitude—"you are safe. Thank God!"

Mr. O'Lally smiled gently but sadly.

"Ah!" cried Mab, stopping short in the path along which he was leading her, "you have not told me all. Her illness is not contagious; but it is none the less fatal."

"Indeed, Dr. Flinn refused to answer my questions on this head; so pray be calm, and keep hope."

"He will not tell me the truth," thought Mab, looking at him wistfully; and she already knew Mr. O'Lally too well to attempt making him tell that which he had resolved not to reveal.

In silence they walked on, and reached the door that led to the sea-shore. Mr. O'Lally opened it, and made her cross the threshold, on which she paused hesitatingly.

"The sea air will revive you, and give you new strength," he said.

Mab yielded ; she felt weak, languid, wretched, and yet blest. She was in no mood to resist him ; to lay her life at his feet, and place her will in his hand, would have seemed to her the fulness of content in that moment. Mr. O'Lally did not take her far. He made her sit down amongst the rocks, and he sat down by her. The tide was out, and the sea lay far away ; a calm plain of blue meeting other azure fields of sky. Between them and the smooth ocean extended a low brown sweep of rock and weed, and shallow pools, and yellow sand—all mingling in one dun tint, and stretching out into the sea its broken outlines.

Mab looked languidly around her, and Mr. O'Lally looked at her. Their eyes met, and parted no more. Their hearts were full of love, tenderness, pity, and sorrow. Mr. O'Lally knew that Mab would soon be bereaved, and she knew that he knew it.

"What shall I do ?" she exclaimed, aloud, "what shall I do ?" She clasped her hands in her grief ; he took her in his arms, and embraced her fondly.

"Hope for the best," he said; "and if the worst should come, remember that nothing in this world can divide us."

"Ah! tell me that again!" cried Mab; "I know it, but I want to know it better."

Again and again he told her what she could not be weary of hearing. With all her grief she felt happy. It was exceeding happiness to think that she should be his wife some day—that she should spend her life with him, and have a right never to leave him. The world might pass away, and perish around her; whilst that remained, there was happiness even in the midst of bitter sorrow.

A feverish, sweet, and yet inexpressibly sorrowful life did Mab lead for the next few days. Every night she sat up with her aunt, and every morning she met Mr. O'Lally on the sea-shore. Sometimes they walked along the sandy beach—oftener they sat in the rocks, on the shingle. They often spent thus an hour and more sitting side by side, and hand in hand, and not uttering one word. They never spoke of love when they did talk—there was no need, for they loved, and they knew it; besides, poor Mab's heart was laden with grief, and there was a line of care on Mr. O'Lally's broad forehead. Mab put no questions, but her wistful eyes read a story of disappointment and bitterness in his face, which she was quick

to understand. She was convinced that his once resistless popularity was rapidly declining, and that his power was no longer acknowledged. All the dearer—if he could be dearer—did he grow to her with that conviction, even as her love only deepened in her heart with her own sorrow.

On the morning of the fourth day, Doctor Flinn came as usual. His face brightened as he saw Miss Ford, who, to Mab, only seemed slightly better. He gave the young girl a nod, meant to convey volumes of hope; but Miss Ford was watching them, and Mab did not dare to follow him out and question him. She knew that Mr. O'Lally was waiting below, that he would waylay and cross-examine Doctor Flinn, and on him she relied.

As soon as she could do so, she slipped out of the sick-room. With a quick step, she ran down the garden path, and reached breathless the spot where he stood waiting. He turned round on hearing her; his face was bright and hopeful.

“Well!” cried Mab.

“Well,” he said, gently, “can’t you guess?”

She raised to him eyes so full of pure joy, of a joy that shed so bright a light over her whole face, that Mr. O'Lally was dazzled. He had seen her animated, proud, pale, and disdainful; he had seen her sweet and tender: but he had never seen her

radiant, and the thought that he owned this bright young creature moved his very heart with love and pride. He took her two hands in his, and looked down in her face with an admiring smile, which, for once, Mab knew not how to read.

"I have not misunderstood you?" she cried, alarmed.

"No—no," he quickly replied; "Doctor Flinn has hopes—great hopes—and you may look, as you feel, happy."

"Very happy!" said Mab.

"Your affections are strong," he continued, still looking down at her keenly, "and the ties that bind you to your home are deep. Mab, can you leave them all for my sake?—ay, even if I leave Ireland—as I may."

Mab's lip quivered, for she thought of Mr. Ford, but she answered:

"I am yours, Mr. O'Lally, in life or in death. Where you go, I go—if you will have me."

"If I will have you!" he repeated after her.
"Oh, Mab!—Mab!"

His look overflowed with passionate tenderness; he loved her, and he was proud of her love for him. This time Mab read his feelings, but she did not feel humbled: a boundless humility filled her heart—the humility of true affection.

"Are you going away, then?" she asked, a little timidly.

"I hope not. I am not conquered yet; but, if they could, how they would hunt me out of my home and land!"

His eye flashed, his lip quivered with resentment.

"We will not think of them," he added, taking her arm within his; "sufficient to each day is the evil thereof."

He cleared his brow. He talked and laughed as lightly as if there were not a care on his mind; and Mab, in the fulness of her joy, laughed with him. They were young, both of them, and life and love were very sweet. They had left the garden; they were walking in the shadow of the cliff, and Mab stopped short, once or twice, to exclaim,

"Oh! I am too happy!"

"Too happy!" he repeated. "Oh, Mab, this is but the dawn of happiness—its noon is yet to come!"

"Better dawn than noon," quickly said Mab; "for after noon comes evening!"

"Never for us, save in the sense of time. The evening of love is for weak hearts, and you are not weak, Mab, nor am I. I love you ten times more now than on that day when we met and spoke by

the shore—and I shall love you ten times more when we are married than I do now."

He spoke half in jest, half in earnest; but it was the true accent of love, heard for the first time by Mab. She did not answer him, for what could she say?—but Mr. O'Lally was a subtle reader of faces, and he could read hers and triumph in its meaning.

Annie's secret affection had always wearied him; he could never have enough of Mab's, though so open and undisguised. The more he drank at that sweet well, the more he thirsted for its waters. The great, the only passion of his life had come to him; it had come in the midst of troubles and cares which would have weighed down many a man, and only gave it a keener joy with him.

They walked until their path was broken by a bright and narrow stream. It fell from the cliff—a thread of quicksilver gleaming amongst the rocks, then spreading on the sandy beach and gliding amongst the grey stones it had for many a year smoothed and rounded, it rushed into the sea, as if eager to be devoured by the vast and calm waters. Mr. O'Lally looked at it curiously, and said to Mab,

"That streamlet comes from Shane's River; it has left the pleasant shade and verdure, and flowed through a barren heath, and for what? To be

absorbed by the sea, that does not need it, and, what is more, that will not long continue to receive it. Look at that rock ! When it falls the course of that little thread of water is for ever dammed up—it must either find another issue, or go back through the heath."

He looked at Mab. She smiled, but so sadly that he asked at once what ailed her. For some time she would not tell him, but he pressed her so anxiously, that she yielded.

"Let us sit down first," she said.

Mr. O'Lally sat on a fragment of rock, and Mab on another, nearer to the water's edge, and a little beneath him. She clasped her arms round her knees, and, looking up at him, said,

"You want to know what I was thinking of, and I will tell you, though I ought not to do so. That water, rushing so eagerly to the sea, is my own heart. I go to you, and you receive me—truly, fondly, nobly. You absorb me in yourself, and make me yourself, and I am content with the lot I have come so far to seek ; but I should be mad if I asked for more, and I do not. Now, Mr. O'Lally, do not smile ! —do not jest and deny !—do not tell me I am talking poetry and romance ! No, I confess I am excited by joy at my aunt's recovery, by fatigue, too, and by the pleasure I feel in being out here with you; but something else ails me, and it is that, even

more than your entreaties, which makes me speak so openly. Apart from, and beyond all, there is a presentiment of coming evil and sorrow upon me. I protest to you that never more firmly than now did I hope and wish to become yours, and spend my life with you, but never, too, did the insecurity of life and of all earthly projects weigh more heavily upon me than it does at this moment. When I saw that stream rushing so fondly to the sea, and you pointed out that rock, so ready to stem its happy flow, a voice cried within me, ‘Behold your fate !’ God alone knows whether the rock will ever fall between us ; but if it should—if the waters should be checked for ever, and retrace their course to their fountain-head—do not forget how fondly they once went to meet you, Mr. O’Lally. They were all yours once—all. I know that if circumstance or death should divide us, some other love will seek you. God grant it may be true and faithful ; but if it should not be so, remember, Mr. O’Lally, that there was one woman who once gave you her whole being, and her whole heart.”

“And if the rock should not fall,” said Mr. O’Lally, trying to smile, though he was deeply moved.

“Then you will be generous enough to forget that I laid my pride at your feet, and said what woman never says.”

“Mab, you are getting very Irish ; your love of simile shews it ; but you do not know the whole story of that streamlet, which God forbid you should resemble. You see it in the calm summer time, when the ocean is smooth and skies are fair ; but in winter or in autumn, the waves leap up to the cliffs and absorb and devour it with reckless strength.”

“Better that than separation,” said Mab, calmly. “I care for nothing but that rock, Mr. O’Lally.”

And she looked up at it with sad earnestness. Mr. O’Lally lightly laid his hand on her shoulder, and, bending over her, said :

“Mab, you think I have no confidence in you—that I keep my thoughts and my cares to myself. Mab, if I receive and do not return, it is that I can return nothing save bitterness.”

“I do not fear it,” she replied, in a low voice ; for the reserve by which he put her on a level with his acquiescent sisters had pained her keenly.

“Very well,” he said, smiling, “you shall have the stormy waves, since you like them, Miss Winter.”

Openly, unreservedly, he laid his position before her. It was a hard one, and one full of perils, as Mab quickly saw. The danger was twofold. Mr. O’Lally had built himself up a power and popu-

larity, which he had taken as the sure foundations of his commercial enterprises; but his yoke had been too heavy, it seemed, for revolt was ripe, and revolt meant ruin. As he disclosed to her, one by one, the speculations in which he had embarked, Mab was dazzled and frightened at their extent. She admired that calm and daring mind, which embraced objects the most varied, and was equal to all, the minute as well as the large. She admired still more the not ungenerous ambition which had led him on. It may be that she exaggerated its disinterestedness, and that Mr. O'Lally was not so unselfish as she imagined and he thought, but she could not exaggerate the breadth and greatness of his aims. They might be visionary, as his lukewarm friends declared—grasping, as his enemies said—none could deny that they were noble and full of golden promise. Mab heard him out with breathless attention, and when he ceased and said :

“ Well, Mab, you know all : how do you think it will end ? ”

She answered, with a flashing eye and an indignant, trembling lip :

“ You may be conquered, for you are one and they are many ; but you must fight it out to the last—come what may ! ”

“ That ‘ may ’ means ruin.”

"And it is ruin and shame to yield, Mr. O'Lally."

They were walking homewards. He seized her hand and grasped it with an ardent pressure. These were words after his own heart.

"I shall never yield!" he said, setting his teeth. "I may wish I had been less imperious with them—I use their own words—but to yield now would be useless and shameful. Besides," he added, with his bright smile, "I still have hope."

He looked hopeful, and roused as well as hopeful. He spoke freely as they walked on, and as freely Mab answered him. He could not weary of that first exchange of confidence and thought. Twice, when they neared the house, he made her turn back, and walk slowly to the stream, still speculating with her on the vicissitudes of the past, on the chances of the future, and taking delight in hearing her comment on either. When they parted, at length, Mr. O'Lally went away with a new feeling in his heart. He loved Mab more, and he loved her differently; for his love had become that union of passion and friendship which is as rare as it is exquisite. Mere passion is shameful bondage, mere friendship is cold, but the two are fervent and divine.

And Mr. O'Lally was young, and had imagination, intellect, fancy, and taste to please, as well as heart and eye.

It was Mab's good fortune to charm all these. Her beauty, both delicate and bright, he had always admired; that mixture of spirit and sweetness, which he read in her face, suited him exactly. He did not like a tame woman, he would have cordially detested a strong-minded one. And now, in his young and scarcely known mistress, he found a temper both ardent and submissive, stores of knowledge which he had not suspected, for both modesty and pride had concealed them, and a mind which, if it had not the strength of his own, possessed a *finesse* and a grace to which he cared to lay no claim, though he acknowledged their power and sweetness. Ay, Mab was the very woman who would grace triumph, or soften adversity; the woman of all women whom Mr. O'Lally should have chosen—the rare pearl beyond all others, whom a man could wear with pride in the sight of all, or delight to possess in secret.

With passionate eagerness he now sought her society. Early every morning they met in the garden, and went down to the shore, lingering there as long as they could, and Mab dared. Often he would appoint a meeting in the day-time, and Mab never felt able to refuse him. It was such perfect pleasure for her, as well as for him, and she saw so well how every such meeting bound her more closely to her lover's heart. Oh! how

many a bright hope, how many a daring scheme, did Mab hear on that solitary shore, along which she walked or sat with Mr. O'Lally !

He had never spoken much of love to her, and he now spoke of it less than ever. Mab knew why—she had grown a part of his being, and he talked to her as we talk to our own hearts. The most impassioned language would not have been so sweet to her ear as his familiar preface to some new confidence :

“Mab, my darling, I forgot to tell you this ;” or, “Mab, do listen to that, and tell me what you think of it.”

If these meetings were dear to Mr. O'Lally, they were priceless to Mab. She felt acutely that this was her halcyon time—her Eden of love. Later she should acknowledge to him her engagement to Robert Ford—oh ! bitter and humiliating confession !—and, as she keenly felt, forfeit some portion of that esteem of which she now possessed the fulness. Later, she should tell Miss Lavinia what had happened, and hear, for the first time, merited reproaches. She should tell Robert, too, and receive his contemptuous forgiveness. All these thoughts tortured her, for neither her conscience nor her pride slumbered. She knew all along what rock it was that hung over her, ever threatening to fall and divide her from Mr. O'Lally. When

he was by, happiness stifled every feeling—when he was away, remorse and shame stifled love. There were moments when she longed to go to him, and tell him all, and have it over—there were other moments when she could have flown to the world's end rather than meet him to utter that terrible confession.

She had other trials—trials which he could not share, as she divided his. It was her torment that Miss Ford spoke incessantly of Robert. And she could leave her less than ever. Only early in the morning could she steal out to Mr. O'Lally, and snatch a few minutes of respite and joy. He did not like the concealment, for, if he had faults, he was too imperious not to be frank ; but he yielded to Mab's representations, that such a revelation would agitate Miss Lavinia too deeply for the present, and neither by him nor by her was it made.

Matters stood thus when Mab, one morning, availing herself of the fact that her aunt was sleeping longer than usual, ventured to linger with Mr. O'Lally by the sea-shore. The sky was grey and clouded, but the air was balmy, the sea slept lazily, the whole aspect of nature was full of sweetness and repose.

Mab felt exquisitely happy. She knew that her cares were waiting for her within, but here, under

God's sky, walking by Mr. O'Lally's side, she felt them not.

Very different was Mr. O'Lally's mood. He looked irritated and indignant; matters were coming to a crisis, and it was a dark one for him. Mab could not speak of hope; even she saw that hope was well-nigh extinguished, but she uttered gentle words of consolation. Mr. O'Lally heard her, and smiled, not without bitterness—for once they did not agree.

"Mab," he said, "you do not know the root of my trouble—it is not that I am a well-nigh ruined and vanquished man, but that I have become such by trusting promises that have been shamefully broken. All these men, now so bitter against me, urged me on when I did not need them; now that I do, they stand aloof, and leave me to fall. Mab, do you think there is anything more infamous than a faith betrayed?—more bitter than to have relied upon it?"

He spoke with vehement energy. Mab gave heaven and earth a despairing look; this, then, was her sentence—it was uttered by his lips, and it sprang from his heart! Mr. O'Lally saw her emotion; he thought his abrupt manner had caused it, and at once he addressed her in gentler language, and in his usual tone.

"I must go in," hastily said Mab, "I have been out a long time."

He wanted to detain her, but for once he could not do so; for once Mab longed to leave him.

Alas! when she entered she did not find peace. Doctor Flinn had come and gone away in her absence, and something else had occurred.

Miss Lavinia sat up in her bed, propped up by pillows. On the sheet before her lay a letter of thin post paper, and even when Mab entered the room the sick lady's eyes did not leave it.

"Oh ! Mab," she said reprovingly, "how I have longed for you to return. Here is a letter for you, and it is from Robert—from dear Robert."

She handed it to her as she spoke.

CHAPTER XI.

MAB's heart sickened within her as she held in her hand the letter which, a few weeks back, would have brought with it a rush of joy. She knew now the meaning of words which, until then, she had scorned, both perplexed and indignant, "the inconstancy of the human heart." This, then, was the fearful change of which she had read and heard, and which she now had the humiliation to witness in her own inmost being.

"Mab, what ails you? Why do you not break the seal?" asked Miss Lavinia, justly wondering.

Mab gave her a scared look, and tore open the letter at once. It was not a long one; Robert was a laconic correspondent, even with Mab, but it overflowed with happy news and happier anticipations.

"Dearest Mab," he wrote, "do not expect a

prolix letter. I have one in two pages folio by me, but I cannot send it, for everything I wrote in it has proved wrong—everything is altered and upset. Now, what do you expect from this preamble? News? Well you may, for I have got news, though incomplete as yet; but if I miss this mail you will not know for ever so long, so here it is: Last night Mr. Norton said to me, ‘Robert, I told you long ago that I should know how to acknowledge your services; the time to do so is come. I will raise the salaries of your two brothers and take you into partnership next year.’ Mab, I could not speak; not even one word could I utter, to thank him especially for William and Ned; but though the tears stood in my eyes, I was mute. Ah! if I had only had your nimble little tongue by me then! I left him and went and told the two boys—I thought they would go wild with joy. They would have it that they owed it all to me; but indeed, Mab, they do not. Two such fine, steady, clever young fellows there are not in the whole colony. God bless them! The more I compare them with others of their years, the prouder I am of my two brothers. And now, dearest Mab, will you not indulge me with the hope that this long probation is drawing to a close? I have worked hard, I can acknowledge it now, and it is gratifying to think that the reward is so nigh.

From some words which Mr. Norton dropped, I understand that I am to be sent to England shortly. There, it is out, though I did not mean to tell you. Yes, Mab, I can go and fetch you and call you mine at last. Well, there is a place here on which I have set my heart for dear Aunt Lavinia and you. It is not our villa on the Thames, Mab, with tall trees and trailing roses and the swans, but you will like it. However, I am not a good hand at describing, and I will not describe the home that is to call you mistress. Dear Mab, I can say no more. I feel too happy to talk much. Give my love to aunty."

"Robert, dear Robert!" cried Miss Lavinia, bursting into tears. "Oh! Mab, is it possible? Can we be so happy? Can we see him again and go away with him? Is God so good to sinners?"

Mab's face turned ashy pale. A hundred serpents seemed tearing her heart.

"Aunt, aunt!" she cried, "I cannot—I will not deceive you any longer! All is over! I shall never be Robert's wife—never—never!"

Miss Lavinia stared at her, and smiled.

"Mab," she said, "you are ill; what ails you? You are ill!"

"No, aunt—not ill—but broken-hearted!"

Her vehement despair stunned Miss Lavinia, for it convinced her.

"And whose wife, then, will you be?" she asked, at last.

She sat up in her bed, and fixed her hollow eyes full upon Mab.

Mab could not answer. She felt overpowered with grief and shame, and hid her face in her hands. Miss Lavinia looked at her a while, then her head sank back on her pillow, and she turned her face to the wall.

"Poor Robert!—poor old Robert!" was all she said.

Mab rose, and bent over her a face bathed with tears.

"Aunt, dear aunt, forgive me!" she entreated; "I could not help it."

"Poor old Robert!" sighed Miss Lavinia again, and she closed her eyes, and would say no more.

Mab felt wrung and tortured with a thousand pangs. There were words in Robert's letter which haunted her like the sound of his reproachful voice, like the look of his appealing eyes. Her childhood and her youth rose before her reprovingly. His kindness, his teaching, his devotedness to his brothers, his calm but sure affection for her, Miss Lavinia's fond and jealous love for him, besieged her like so many separate enemies, for with

every one of these her new love would make her break.

It was not that she repented that love—she could not, for she had never loved Robert Ford ; she knew it now, and it was inconceivable to her how she could have taken the affection of habit for the feeling which rules a life-time. Oh ! bitter mistake, to be yet cruelly avenged. Yet she could not think without terror of Robert's return, and with still deeper fear did she contemplate confessing all to Mr. O'Lally. She knew in what light he held a broken promise. What if, on learning how readily she had left her first lover for him, his only feeling should be contempt for a heart so weak and faithless ? Alas ! wherever Mab might turn she saw amongst those dark and alienated faces but one ever loving, ever friendly, and it was not Mr. O'Lally's—it was Mr. Ford's. Yes, her heart could lean upon him with filial trust, and take refuge in his indulgent tenderness. Whatever she might do, he would stand by her, and defend her. Oh ! that he were only near, that she might open her whole heart to him, and get that solace in her sorrow !

“God help me, and deliver me from this misery !” prayed Mab, the whole of that bitter day.

And the prayer was heard, and deliverance did

come—but, as it often comes, through the deeper grief.

The day was well-nigh worn. Mab, unable to remain any longer in that sick-chamber, where her aunt preserved a silence so reprobating, went down to the garden. This time she did not think, or even wish, to meet Mr. O'Lally. He was away, far away; and solitude, if it could not soothe, at least did not irritate her secret torment. She walked along the garden alleys. A light rain was falling, she did not heed it, though her head was bare, and her summer dress was thin. Presently a quick step was heard on the gravel. She knew it—it was he. She stood still, unable to retreat or fly. He came up to her, chiding in his eye, reproof on his lips.

“Out in this chill, fine rain!” he said, looking at her hair all sparkling with dew, at the drooping folds of her muslin dress. “Oh, Mab! what do you deserve?”

She tried to smile, but he was struck with her pallor, with the deadly coldness of the hand he had taken, and held clasped in his.

“What has happened since this morning?” he asked, quickly; “what ails you?—are you ill?—will you speak to Doctor Flinn?”

“Is Doctor Flinn here?” asked Mab, roused at once by so unusual a visit; for Doctor Flinn had

been in the morning, and had not spoken of returning. There was the slightest shade of embarrassment on Mr. O'Lally's countenance, as he answered, with a smile :

"I came home to look for papers I had forgotten, and, meeting him on the way, I made him come with me."

"My aunt is worse!" cried Mab; "I know and feel it, though you will not tell it to me."

She hastily went past him; he followed her, seeking to calm her fears, but Mab scarcely heard him. As they entered the house, they met Doctor Flinn coming down the staircase.

Mab ran up to him, pale and breathless. She seized his hands, she looked eagerly in his face.

"Doctor Flinn," she said, "tell me the truth: my aunt is worse, much worse, Doctor Flinn—I must know all!"

"Oh! you must—must you?" good-humouredly said Doctor Flinn; "well, then, Mistress Wilful, know this much: Miss Ford is a little lower to-day than she was yesterday—that is all."

"Doctor Flinn, was she so this morning when you came?"

"Miss Ford is not so well to-day as she was yesterday."

Mab dropped his hands and went up the staircase, agitation in her looks.

"Now don't you go and disturb her with questions," said Doctor Flinn, a little anxiously; "I exact absolute repose."

A sudden light seemed to break across Mab. She turned back and came down quickly.

"Doctor Flinn," she whispered, "do you think it is emotion is the cause of my aunt's state?"

"How can I tell?—you have not been scolding her, have you?"

"No—but—but we got a letter from Australia this morning—from Robert Ford, her favourite nephew."

Doctor Flinn looked extremely angry.

"And who told you to read letters from Australia to her?" he asked. "Are you not wise enough to guess that sickness is not equal to what health can bear?"

Mab did not answer, but she leaned her head on the oak banisters, and clasping her hands above it, groaned aloud. Doctor Flinn was shocked and alarmed.

"Come, come," he said kindly, "I daresay there was nothing so dreadful in that letter. The news were not desperately bad, were they?"

"No," answered Mab, raising her head, and trying to compose herself, "they were good."

"Then set your heart at ease. Good news could do her no harm—none; but if bad news

should come, be careful; hide, conceal, do anything rather than tell the truth."

Little did Doctor Flinn know what he was doing. Little did Mr. O'Lally understand the meaning of the heartstricken look Mab gave him, before she turned away from them both and once more ascended the staircase. When the door above had closed upon her, Mr. O'Lally said anxiously,

"Well, Doctor Flinn, what do you think of Miss Ford?"

"Think of her!—I think she is a dead woman, Mr. O'Lally. I feared it this morning—I am sure of it now. It is a relapse, and a fatal one."

"Are you sure that the agitation of that letter
—"

"She had received no letter this morning, and I already saw the dawn of what is fulfilled now. Strong emotions could do her no good, of course; but you know what I told you all along, she seemed better and I was bound to say so, but it was a better, in which I had no faith."

Such had indeed been Doctor Flinn's verdict throughout, and he had imparted it to Mr. O'Lally, who had not thought it needful to tell Mab.

And what did Mab think and feel upstairs? Ask it not—seek not to know, if remorse and grief have never united to torture your own heart. She alluded no more to the letter, and Doctor Flinn

could not remove the sting he had involuntarily inflicted; but she would not leave Miss Lavinia's room. No more did she meet Mr. O'Lally by the sea-shore or in the garden. Night and day she sat by the sick-bed on which Miss Ford once more lay prostrate and torpid, rarely speaking, and when she did speak, never of Robert, or of what had passed between them concerning him. On the evening of the third day after her relapse, she rallied considerably. Trembling hope awoke in Mab's heart.

"Oh ! aunt, how much better you seem !" she could not help saying.

"I am better, Mab, and I shall tell you why," she replied with some energy ; "I am going to prepare for my last journey—the time has come. Mab send for the parish priest—that Mr. Mac—I can never remember his name, but you know my meaning. From the first I liked his face."

Mab obeyed. The priest was sent for and came. Whilst he was with her aunt she went down. She found Mr. O'Lally below. He rose on seeing her, and took her in his arms with the tenderness of a father or a friend—not with the love of a lover. And Mab yielded to that protecting and friendly caress. She laid her head on his shoulder and cried there, as if her heart would break ; it was bitter, but it was sweet to pour forth her grief thus and there.

"Poor Mab!—poor little Mab!" he said, softly, when her tears had ceased to flow, and her sobs became less frequent; "my poor little darling, remember that if you lose love, infinite love, love deep and true, is left to you! Oh, Mab! do you not think that I ought to speak to your aunt—to tell her that if God calls her away, you remain, not merely safe with my sisters and me, but that your home is henceforth here—that you are the future mistress of O'Lally's Town."

With a shiver Mab withdrew from the arms that still clasped her. Ah! it would have been well if she had told him all in that moment; but, if she loved him infinitely, she also feared him deeply, and she dared not.

"What is it?—what ails you?" he asked, surprised at her scared look.

"Nothing," she faltered; "but you must not speak to my aunt. I know her—it would only agitate, and perhaps pain her. She would trouble herself about my uncle's consent."

"Are you not certain of it?"

"As I live," she replied. "But dear aunt has never felt sure of anything in her life. It would only agitate her."

"As you please," he said; but he did not seem quite satisfied. Perhaps his pride was hurt—perhaps Mab's hesitating manner awakened involun-

tary suspicion. And she could not bear deceiving him thus. She was fast becoming hateful in her own eyes, even more for his sake than for Robert Ford's. Unable to remain with him, and meet that compassionate, trusting look she had so cruelly betrayed, she left him abruptly, and went back to her aunt.

A night-lamp lit the room, feebly in its remote corners, distinctly enough around the bed, near which it stood. Miss Lavinia's face lay on her pillow—a holy calm was spread over it. At the foot of the bed sat the priest, his grey hair hung around his brown and rugged face, but there, too, Mab read peace—that peace of the heart which comes from God, and is of God, and surpasseth all understanding. Oh! how she envied them!—the aged man, the dying woman—but both conquerors in the fierce battle of life, in which she had already been defeated.

On seeing Mab standing sadly at the threshold of the door, Miss Lavinia smiled, and beckoned her to approach.

"Mab," she said, when Mab stood near her, "I only want to tell you this—I am happy—very happy. I do not know when I have been so much so, so truly so!"

She spoke clearly, distinctly, without hesitation. Mab had never seen her so. But that cloud of in-

decision and vagueness which had so long obscured a gentle heart and a fine mind, had passed away from her at the approach of death, as night mists melt away before the morning sun.

"Poor Mab!—poor little Mab!" she said several times to her, "if I could only make you see as I see, how different this world and all it holds would seem to you! Poor child! God help you!—I see bitter sorrow in store for you yet."

"And so do I," thought Mab.

All was not over; and the priest's mission was not fulfilled.

Miss Livinia received the Last Sacraments of the Church with devout reverence. When this was accomplished, she turned back to this world's concerns, and with a precision, a minuteness, and a decision that amazed Mab, she gave her the most exact directions concerning all that should be done for her, and how the little she left should be disposed of. She forgot no one in this distribution of gifts, least of all Mr. O'Lally servants; and, having settled everything to her satisfaction, she said, with a little sigh of weariness,

"And now, I think, I have only to die."

She closed her eyes as she spoke, and seemed to sink into a calm slumber.

It lasted the whole night long. Mab watched by her, but not alone; Mr. O'Lally insisted on

sharing that vigil with her. Towards morning Miss Lavinia roused herself again ; she saw Mab's companion without surprise, and thanked him gently for having remained with Mab.

"But I should like to speak to her alone," she added, quietly.

Mr. O'Lally rose at once, and, with a failing heart, Mab saw him leave the room. She felt a struggle coming, and with him strength and hope seemed to depart.

"Dear Mab," said Miss Lavinia, taking the young girl's hand, and looking fondly in her face, "I cannot die, and let you do that thing. I have thought of it the whole night long, even when I seemed to sleep. No, Mab, you must not betray Robert—it would be a dreadful sin!—I do not speak for his sake, but for your own. Oh, Mab! be true!—be true!"

"Aunt," said Mab, "hear me. I love Robert dearly, but not as I should love a husband. Aunt, I did not know better."

Miss Lavinia looked in her eyes, and smiled.

"Mab," she said, gently, "reverse the case. You have been jealous of Nelly Norton. I know you have. Suppose Robert wrote to you, not now, but a year back, and said, 'Mab, I committed a mistake—it is not you, but Nelly whom I love.'

Mab, just tell me what you would have thought of that?"

Mab could not answer; her conscience told her how bitter her resentment of such infidelity would have been.

"No—no," pursued Miss Lavinia, with much energy; "believe a dying woman, child; such excuses are but the self-deceit of human weakness. You loved Robert!"

"Never, aunt!"

"You loved him. You would have married him; you gave him your promise, and that promise, which should have been sacred, you are ready to break, because the law does not make it binding. And what if your love for Mr. O'Lally should grow cool, and another should arise in your heart?"

"Never!" cried Mab, roused into self-defence; "I am wrong towards Robert—I know it; but my love for Mr. O'Lally is true and deep. Aunt, I should love him on my death-bed—I should love him in the next world!"

"Child, the love which rests on a faith betrayed is weak love. Your conscience will kill yours."

"Never!" said Mab again. "For, aunt, you wrong me. I never loved Robert, and I loved Mr. O'Lally the first moment I saw him."

"Poor Robert!" sighed Miss Lavinia; "poor

Robert, toiling in a distant country to win you a home, and you betraying him here—poor old Robert !”

Mab’s tears flowed freely.

“ God knows it breaks my heart,” she said, “ but I cannot help it ; I am now pledged to Mr. O’Lally, and death alone can divide us.”

“ Pledged to Mr. O’Lally !” almost cried Miss Lavinia, clasping her trembling hands. “ Pledged to him, and not released by Robert !—and did you tell him of that engagement ?”

Mab was silent.

“ Did you tell him ?” asked Miss Lavinia, raising herself on one elbow.

“ No,” answered Mab, faintly.

“ And you began a second engagement before the first was broken ?—and you are bound to Mr. O’Lally and to Robert at the same time !”

“ I did not dare to tell him !” said Mab, hiding her face in her hands.

“ I pity you,” said Miss Lavinia, “ from my heart—I pity you, and I pity Mr. O’Lally. You have begun by deceiving him, by making him your dupe. God help you, Mab ! I see a bitter future before you.”

And so did Mab, and she wrung her hands with unfeigned anguish. How often had she wakened

from her sleep at the thought of Mr. O'Lally's burning indignation.

"Poor little thing!" pityingly said Miss Lavinia, "how a little honour would have saved you!"

"Oh, aunt! do not be so severe!"

"Say that to Mr. O'Lally."

"Aunt, he need not know," gasped Mab.

"Not know!—not know! Why, you do not suppose I will let you deceive him? No, Mab, I will not die with that on my conscience. If you do not tell him, I shall."

Miss Lavinia spoke with much energy and inexorable will.

Mab turned pale as death. Her long slumbering pride awoke, her conscience spoke, and would be heard, and love and passion were both silenced—for that moment, at least.

"You need tell him nothing," she said. "I shall tell him all myself. He shall be my judge—he shall know the past. I will even do more—by that past I will abide—and relinquish him, if needs be."

"You will do that?" cried Miss Lavinia, with a gleam of joy.

"So help me, God—I will!"

There came a great change across Miss Lavinia's face. The flame of life, which her love for Ro-

bert had kindled anew, went out fast. Mab ran to the door, and called Mr. O'Lally; he came at once; they stood side by side near Miss Lavinia's bed. Her dying look sought Mab.

"Remember!" she whispered, and, pressing the young girl's hand, she closed her eyes. Thus she fell into a calm slumber—the deepest and the last.

At noon Mr. O'Lally looked compassionately at Mab.

"All is over!" he said, softly.

She did not hear him. She stood by the dead, rigid and pale as death herself. She felt as if a great cloud had come over her—and so there had. It lasted days, and when it passed away it left her weak and prostrate on a sick-bed.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN consciousness returned to Mab she found herself in bed, in a strange room, of which the very furniture was unknown to her. Through the open window she saw the top branches of young trees, on which shone the morning sun, and above them a soft blue sky, with grey, fleecy clouds. A gentle breeze stirred the muslin curtains; birds sang without, and she saw a yellow butterfly hover in the air. She looked at all these things with languid curiosity; then suddenly memory came back, and, burying her face in her pillow, she cried bitterly.

"Poor child!" softly said the kind voice of Miss Ellen Ford.

"Let her cry," whispered Miss Emily; "you know Doctor Flinn said it would do her good."

Mab compelled herself to grow calm, and looked

at the sisters. She vaguely remembered seeing their two faces ever near her during her brief, though severe illness. Yes, he had told them all, and they had watched over her as over a priceless treasure.

Very gently and tenderly they told her what there was to tell. She had been removed from O'Lally's Town to Doctor Flinn's house, but everything had been done as she could have wished it, not by them—Doctor Flinn and Mr. O'Lally had not even told them of Miss Ford's illness until all was over; and Mab knew it was best, lest the sad sight should shatter minds already so weak—but by Mr. O'Lally. What they did not say Mab guessed, and she closed her wearied eyelids; she was surfeited with the dreary knowledge.

So she had left his house—the tie of hospitality was broken ; the other tie would soon follow. Oh! how Mab longed for death ! An evil longing. But she was not herself then. There are for us all stages of feeling when the balance of judgment is gone—when reason and her calm array of arguments alike are mute—when the aching heart alone is strong, and, in its agony cries out for death, as the hireling for his wished-for wages.

But with the strong and true this bitter mood cannot last. Mab soon grew calm, not merely in outward aspect, but in inner feeling. She looked

forward towards her bitter future with a sort of resignation. She did not think she should ever be Robert's wife, for she was resolved to tell him all, and she knew his pride; but she would act as if she were to be his—she would hold out no hope to herself, or to her lover—she would be Robert's until he released her; and she would tell Mr. O'Lally all. She knew him, too, and she felt confident that once he had broken with her, it would be for ever. He loved her, and very dearly, but he would wait no man's bidding to have her. Besides, who knew—who could tell—jealousy might quicken Robert's calm love—a blank followed this dreary thought.

When Mab woke again, she was much better and much stronger. Doctor Flinn was feeling her pulse, and he nodded to Miss Emily, who forthwith informed Mab that Mr. Ford had written to Mr. O'Lally.

"He is somewhere in France; not well enough to come and look for you himself, and he is very much afflicted by the sad news; but he says that a Mrs. Norton, now in Dublin, is to come and fetch you next month. Now, my dear, do you know where Mrs. Norton lives?—that we may write to her not to take the trouble. For, I need not tell you, our brother will not allow you to go."

"That will do for to-day," said Doctor Flinn,

forestalling Mab's reply ; " my patient looks agitated—no more, please."

Mab did not see Mr. O'Lally for several days. She was sitting, one morning, in Miss Flinn's parlour, when she heard that lady's voice talking outside, and another voice answering it. It was his.

Mab's face was in a flame in a moment. She clutched Miss Ellen's garments, and said, eagerly, " Do not leave me."

The surprised look had not yet died away from Miss Ellen's face, when the door opened and Miss Emily entered, preceding her brother. He stood behind her, pale, worn, and anxious-looking, but his whole aspect breathing a strong and manly affection which stirred Mab's very heart. She held out her hand as he came towards her ; he took it, and, holding it within his own, he looked at her long, but without speaking.

" Thank God you are so well again ! " was all he said.

Mab tried to smile, a dreary attempt. The flush of the moment had died from her face, and left it of a deathly paleness. But Mr. O'Lally would not be alarmed ; Doctor Flinn had said there was no fear, and he would dread nothing.

" Come, Mr. O'Lally, that will do," said Miss

Flinn, putting in her brown face at the door; "my patient must not be intruded upon any longer."

Mr. O'Lally turned round with a smile, and, quietly bidding Mab good morning, he left the room.

"I call that obedience," approvingly said Miss Flinn, patting him on the shoulder as she showed him out through the garden.

"What do you think of her?" he asked.

"I think that when her colour has come back, she will be as pretty as ever—Ah! you are a true man, Mr. O'Lally. I remember when you were a boy you rather scorned beauty, but you have learned to feel its power—quite natural, Mr. O'Lally."

Mr. O'Lally looked disdainful.

"Miss Winter is pretty," he said, "but both you and I, Miss Flinn, have seen far prettier girls than she is. Thank God! she has something beyond what illness could destroy, and what time will assuredly take away."

"What a philosopher!" replied Miss Flinn, with great sarcasm; "only hear him! A girl with a long nose, a squint, and red hair, would charm him just as much, provided, of course, she had a mind and a heart, as that little delicate lady, with her golden locks, her sweet eyes, and her lily-white skin. Of course, I believe that!"

"I am glad you do," said Mr. O'Lally, laughing;

and, as he had reached the garden gate, he gave her his hand and bade her good morning.

Miss Flinn looked after him with admiring eyes, then turned round sharply on hearing a step behind her. It was Miss Ellen, walking fast, in the hope of overtaking her brother, but he was already out of sight.

"He is gone," drily said Miss Flinn, "you should have come sooner."

"I wanted to speak to him about Miss Winter," exclaimed Miss Ellen, disappointed.

"And what have you to say against her?" asked Miss Flinn; "of course you do not think her good enough for your brother! Let me tell you, he might wait years, and not get one half so good as that pretty, modest, intelligent girl—but she is not an O'Lally, of course!" added Miss Flinn with great scorn.

Miss Ellen looked piteous, and remained mute, whilst Miss Flinn, happy at having put down some one, walked away triumphant.

No sooner did Miss Ellen leave the parlour than Mab, clasping Miss Emily's hand, whispered eagerly,

"You must help me—never leave me alone with Mr. O'Lally."

Miss Emily's blue eyes overflowed with amazement.

"I can never marry him," said Mab, "never—never!"

Still Miss Emily was too much amazed to speak.

"Why so?" she asked at length.

It was Mab's turn to be mute.

"Why, he means to marry you soon and leave Ireland."

Leave Ireland! Then he was conquered. That was why she had found him so altered and so worn, and it was in that bitter hour of trial that she was forsaking him.

"God help me!" she said, "how shall I do it?"

Miss Emily put no questions, offered no condolence. She had too much tact for one, and too little faith for the other. She could not believe that Mab, that any woman would willingly give up her brother, and she could not see the necessity for doing so in Mab's case. Besides, if Mr. O'Lally wished for Mab—and she could not doubt the sincerity of his passion—would he not have her in spite of every obstacle? And yet, involuntary hope that Mab might have spoken the truth, that Annie's case might not be hopeless yet, lingered in Miss Emily's heart, and, with praiseworthy fidelity, she adhered to Mab's request, and never left her side when her brother was by.

Mr. O'Lally did not seem to wish to see or to

speak to Mab alone for several days, but when she began to move about the house, when, gaining strength with a rapidity that amazed Doctor Flinn, she even went out and walked in the garden, Mr. O'Lally found with some surprise that his sister Emily was her constant companion. At first he bore this in silence, and attributed it to accident; but when he saw the pertinacity with which his sister clung to one whom in her heart she did not love much, and he knew it, he plainly said to her one morning,

“Emily, I wish to speak to Miss Winter, presently—do you mind leaving me alone with her in the garden for a while?”

“I shall do so if you wish it,” calmly replied his sister, “but it is at her request that I stay with her when you call upon her.”

“You are not jesting, Emily?”

“Certainly not.”

Mr. O'Lally coloured violently. He felt deeply displeased. No matter what Mab's motives might be, she had put a third person between herself and him—a serious offence. What strange caprice now ruled the girl who had met him so freely by the sea-shore; as frank and true in her love as he had been delicate and honourable in his; but he would not be hasty, he would not judge her without hearing her, nor attribute to caprice what might spring

from a nobler motive. His sister, who was watching his face attentively, now said to him,

“What shall I do ?”

“Nothing,” he laconically replied.

“Ah !” she could not help exclaiming, “why did you not prefer Annie ?”

“Ah,” he playfully replied, “what a difference !”

The door opened as he spoke, and Mab entered. She wore her mourning, and that dark dress gave almost unearthly delicacy to her pale face. Sudden tenderness softened in Mr. O’Lally’s look as he saw her, and the last traces of displeasure vanished from his countenance. A gentle glow lit up Mab’s features ; she might give him up, but she could not help loving him. He advanced to meet her, and she stood waiting. Miss Emily watched their meeting. He took her two hands in his and looked down, smiling in her upraised face. Ah ! never—never would his eyes rest with that fond look on another woman—never, never would she give to another that deep fervent gaze she now gave to him, that mingled love and reverence which it is the happiness of a woman’s heart to bestow. “They cannot part,” thought Miss Emily, “they are too fond of one another—and it is a pity they should ; but there is no fear—he will not let her go.”

She remained apart whilst Mr. O’Lally led Mab

to the window. He still held her hands in his, and spoke to her in a tone too low for Miss Emily to overhear him. She saw Mab redden, then turn pale, then smile, not without effort, and her lips move in reply, and their conversation, such as it was, was over for the morning.

As soon as she found an opportunity to do so, Mab took Miss Emily apart.

"Do not deny me what I am going to ask of you," she said earnestly. "I leave this house to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" interrupted Miss Emily, who, whilst she stood looking at them in the window, had been wondering how soon the marriage ceremony could take place.

"Yes, to-morrow," said Mab. "I have written to Mrs. Norton not to come and look for me—I shall go to her in Dublin."

"My dear," agitatedly exclaimed Miss Emily, "I can abet you no longer. My brother would throw all the blame upon me—I really cannot—I must tell him."

"I shall tell him myself—but, as I said, I am going to-morrow—I have written to Mrs. Norton in Dublin to wait for me. I am going, and your brother can marry Miss Gardiner, whom you love so much."

"I love her dearly," replied Miss Emily with

spirit ; “ but it is you my brother wishes to marry.”

“ I shall never be his wife—never. Do not ask why—I shall tell him ; but grant me a favour. Let me go alone to Shane’s Country to-day. I must see the poor grave for a first and last time ; but I know you will care for it.”

“ Ay, that I will, poor child ! But you will not go—or if you do, you will come back. I love Annie dearly, but I shall love my brother’s wife more dearly still.”

She took and pressed Mab’s hand. His wife ! How Mab’s heart ached to hear his sister utter the words ! She apathetically left her hand in Miss Emily’s, but raising her eyes she seemed to ask from above that strength to struggle and endure, without which there was no hope of victory.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN the course of the afternoon Mab slipped out of the house unobserved, as she thought; but scarcely had she walked ten steps, when a firm hand was laid upon her arm, and looking round with a start, she saw Miss Flinn.

“How dare you stir?” asked that authoritative lady.

“Dear Miss Flinn,” coaxingly replied Mab, “I want a change.”

“A change!—nonsense! You are going to Shane’s Country, and, what is worse, you are going away to-morrow, and everything is at sixes and sevens between you and Mr. O’Lally. Now, don’t blush—I am too clear-sighted to be deceived. What is it? Is it a misunderstanding with him?—have his sisters been poking in that Annie Gardiner, whom I can’t endure? Don’t mind telling

me. I have cheated Doctor Flinn out of many a patient, and I will cheat them out of their brother, with as little scruple. Do you want to meet him? —leave it to me."

This friendly offer disconcerted Mab greatly.

"Thank you," she replied; "I am indeed going away to-morrow, but Mr. O'Lally does not know it yet; I shall tell him this evening. And I must go to Shane's Country, Miss Flinn—I must—I must!"

There was something in her voice which made Miss Flinn relax the hold she still kept of her. She felt that to visit her aunt's grave was not Mab's greatest trial. She gave her a piercing look and said,

"Well, you must have your way in that, at least; but, I warn you, Mr. O'Lally shall know you are going. I always liked love stories to end well, and it will go hard if this one ends badly through any fault of mine. What matter about his sisters? They are a pair of silly women. Anyone who sees you and Mr. O'Lally together can see that you were made for each other. I defy seas and mountains to keep you apart, and apart you shall not be, if I can help it. Besides, I can't bear Annie."

Mab heard her in silence: her eyes bent, her features fixed as marble. Hope was dead, and no

language, however friendly, could revive it now. Miss Flinn gave her an expressive look, and turned back to the house in no hopeful mood. Mab went on her way.

Day was declining when she reached Shane's Country. How calm, how sweet seemed that home of the dead! Mab soon found the grave which had wakened Miss Ellen's forebodings, and haunted her aunt's sick-bed. It was filled now, for in it, according to her wish, Miss Lavinia had been laid; a slab of plain stone marked the spot; it was not yet fenced in, but her name and a simple "*Requiescat in pace*" were already engraven on its new white surface, free, as yet, from moss or stain.

By that grave Mab stood mute and hopeless. A rosy flush lit earth and sky, tints of orange and gold passed across the rocks, and the dark verdure of the valley below contrasted with the pale emerald of the little nook above; it was a spot full of beauty and repose, but Mab saw and felt nothing of its loveliness. She had come there to bid the dead a last adieu, and to pour out in the silence and solitude of the spot the burthen of her living sorrows.

She knelt at the foot of the grave, and tried to pray, but as her grief rose and overwhelmed her, she threw herself on the cold stone with a passion

unknown to her calm youth. She sobbed aloud in the transport of her grief :

“Aunt!—aunt!—what have you done?” she moaned again and again—for, alas! life and life’s feelings were twined around her very heart, and to that spot, where everything spoke of mortality, where the sod rose in green hillocks, where skulls lay hidden in the high waving grass, Mab had carried the image of Mr. O’Lally. She had striven for strength, but strength had not come; she had endeavoured to forget him, and never had he been more living in her heart. Every impulse, every thought, every wish, seemed to cling to him.

“Oh! if I could, if I only could forget!” she moaned again.

“Mab!—dear Mab!” said a fond and well-known voice. It was he; he had returned unexpectedly, and had made Shane’s Country his way home, in order to see that his orders had been fulfilled; and thus, against her wish and not with his, he found her.

She looked up, and, in all her grief she found comfort and consolation in his face. It was bitter, it was cruel, to give him up, but it was very sweet to be so loved. He compelled her to rise; he led her away to the old porch: he made her sit down on a broken shaft, and, sitting down by her side,

he took her hand in his. He loved her very much; he loved her in her sorrow and her loneliness, in all that made him feel her doubly his.

“Why did they let you come here alone?” he said, reproachfully. “My poor little darling, they should not.”

“It was my wish.”

“Why did you not let me come with you?”

“Grief is best alone.”

“No, Mab, not always. Mab, you have your sorrows, and I have mine. Mab, my heart is broken!”

And, before she could guess his intention, he had flung his arms around her, his head was resting on her bosom, and he was crying like a child. Mab forgot all, except his grief.

“What is it?—what is it?” she cried. “Oh, God! help me!—what can have happened to you?”

He did not answer at once, and she bent her face over him, and covered his forehead with kisses and tears. At length he looked up, red and ashamed, at having given way so far.

“Mab,” he said, trying to smile, “I think I must have known you in my dreams; at all events, you are a part of myself, and with you I need feel no shame at my weakness. I cannot. Oh, Mab!

though these tears are the first I have shed since I was a boy, I could shed tears more bitter still, when I think of what I have gone through to-day. Mab, their ingratitude would break a prouder heart than mine. They have turned against me, every man of them ; they have, the traitors, the cowards!—and the labour of years, the care, the toil of a lifetime, have perished in one hour!"

He had risen as he spoke, and he was walking agitatedly amongst the graves. Mab followed him, and, passing her arm within his, tried to soothe him. He stopped short, and looked down at her very sorrowfully.

"God knows how dearly I love you," he said ; "but even you, my little Mab—ay, even you—have no cure for this sorrow. Mab, you do not know your own birth and kin ; perhaps you are of Irish race, at all events, I am sure I have given you an Irish heart. Mab, my country has been the passion of my youth. She has saved me from many an error, from many a fall—for I vowed, as a boy, that she should be proud of me yet—and now this is the end of it all. They say I am ambitious—I am—I declare, I vow I am ; would many place their ambition as I once placed mine? Well, it is over now ; they have conquered. I resolved once that what one man could do for

Ireland should be done by me ; I kept clear, as I thought, of every element of discord and strife. I compelled myself to think of the lowest form of prosperity, the material ; but I hoped to make it a step to the higher—and you see how I have fared. Oh, Mab !—Mab !—it is too much !”

His tears fell no more ; that fountain, so rarely unsealed in manhood, had once more run dry, but his lips quivered ; and Mab, with a heart full of woe, felt that his heart was, indeed, broken ; ay, he was wrecked in one of those aims of life that are all in all to man.

“ Yes,” he said, looking down at her wistfully, “ I met them all to-day. I bent my pride so far as to ask what my sin had been, and to extend the hand of reconciliation ; but they informed me, through their precious mouthpiece, Mr. Briggs, that it was too late—that, as a friend and neighbour, I was welcome to stay amongst them, but that they could no longer have a master. Their own words, Mab. Stay !” he added, firing up ; “ stay !—never ! I will pack up my household gods, and seek a more friendly shore. And I will take you with me, my little fairy-queen,” he added, trying to smile. “ Mab, I will not exaggerate—I will not say what is never true, that your love is everything to me—no, it is not—for I have lived

and could live yet, for other things—but I will say this, it is the only sweetness now left in my lot—the only consolation of my adversity."

"God help me!" cried Mab, "or I am undone—undone!"

"What is it?" asked Mr. O'Lally, looking down at her with surprise in his face. "What ails you?"

"Oh, aunt!—aunt!" moaned Mab.

"Poor child!—poor child!" he said, clasping her in his arms. "Mab, it is a cruel loss; but there is much love left to you."

She looked up in his face; she read his meaning there. Oh! how much he loved her! It was cruel, it was terrible to give him up, and yet it must be done.

"For God's sake, let me go!" she said. "You do not know what you are doing."

He released her at once, surprised, and pained,

"God help me!" said Mab. "I wish I were dead ere it had come to this. I wish I were dead!"

"What is it?" he asked, uneasily.

"We must part," said Mab.

"Never!" he answered, smiling, and thinking she alluded to her intention of taking a journey to England. "If needs it must be, I shall go with

you and Mrs. Norton—ay, and bring you back to O'Lally's Town."

Mab gave a desolate look below. Never, never again should she see the dwelling at the foot of the mountain, and that long wild shore, and its cloudy skies—never, never!

"Forgive me!" she cried. "Of all your enemies I am the most treacherous and the most cruel—for I have deceived you. We must part, and part for ever!"

Mr. O'Lally looked thunderstruck; but he soon rallied. He took Mab's two hands, and pressed them within his own, with a force of which he was unconscious.

"No, Mab," he said; "if I but hold up my little finger my two sisters will rise and follow me to the end of the earth; and you, so much nearer than they are—you, a part of myself—you cannot stay behind when I go."

"Oh! I cannot—I cannot!" said Mab, weeping bitterly; "forgive me—but I cannot."

"Mab, you love me—if ever I read love in your eyes, I read it there this morning—how can you remain, then, if I go?"

Mab's head sank on her bosom, and her face shunned his look.

"I have been engaged to Robert Ford these three years," she said.

She said no more, but she had said enough. He dropped her hands, as if they had been fire. He did not speak—he seemed unable—the sudden blow deprived him of speech, and almost of thought. His first act was to leave her side—his next to give her a look of the deepest indignation—a look from which she shrank ashamed and afraid.

Mab had hoped that Mr. O'Lally's first impulse would be that of wounded love. She had not taken into account a temper of the most jealous pride. He felt duped, deceived, and wantonly betrayed, and in his anger he forgot Mab's excuse —her love for him. He only remembered that for weeks she had cruelly played with his passion, and now, when it had become a part of his being, she told him what he should have known from the first moment. He could not trust himself with words, he walked away to the end of the church-yard.

When he came back he found Mab sitting, apathetic and pale, on the broken shaft-pillar. He stopped before her, and, looking down at her, he said, coldly,

“I forgive you, Miss Winter—which is more than you have a right to expect; but I would scorn to resent a woman's offence, least of all yours; only pray tell me this—what was your motive?”

The cold sarcasm of his tone stung her very

heart. She started to her feet, flushed and indignant.

“My motive!” she said—“my motive was that I loved you, and that I was mad. Despise me—it is your right, as a man, for having wantonly betrayed the secret no woman reveals; but do not dare to doubt me.”

“Despise you!” said Mr. O’Lally, with sudden softness. “No, Mab, but you are mine; mine by the best of all rights, your own gift, and I cannot give you up.”

He laid his hand on her shoulder, and looked down at her securely. Mab closed her eyes, not to see him. Now was the terrible moment—the struggle for life and death. Death! Oh! what was it? She envied her aunt in her grave. She had lived and died without having known passion; never had her heart and her conscience been at strife. Oh! had she undergone those pangs, she would not have laid that cruel injunction upon her. She looked up at Mr. O’Lally.

“Hear me,” she said, “then be my master and my judge. Know all, then decide.”

She sat down, and he sat down by her side. She told him the story of her youth, and told it truly. She excused, she palliated nothing. He learned from her all her weaknesses and vanities—so far as she herself knew them; and every

detail of her ill-fated engagement with Robert Ford.

“And did you not love him?” asked Mr. O’Lally.

“No—if I were on my death-bed, I should still say I did not. How often has he reproached me with it, and taxed me with my indifference. Oh! that I had heeded his father’s warnings!—but I was vain!—it pleased me to have a lover—one, too, whom Ellen Norton would have been glad to take from me; and I was wilful, too, and, perhaps, I was grateful to Robert, who had been very kind to me; and so it was done—and now it is past my undoing.”

“Why so?” asked Mr. O’Lally; “have you made no promise to me?”

“Do not remind me of it!” cried Mab, with despair. “I can forgive myself loving you; I could not help it, and though it has been misery, it has been happiness too—the greatest, the deepest I have ever known, or shall ever know again. But I cannot forgive myself deceiving you. I should have told you at once; I should have made you turn from me with coldness and surprise, and, perhaps, with contempt—but I should not have deceived you. But, remember, I had not time to think before I was both betrayed and beloved. It was so great a joy, that everything

else seemed weak in comparison. I gave up Robert and my promise in my heart, and became all yours. And if he had not written, and my dying aunt had not appealed to my conscience and my honour, I do believe that yours I should be still."

"Mab," said Mr. O'Lally, "if you had loved that young man, and had been faithless to him through lightness or weakness of heart, I would not have you—for I should despise you; but you say you never loved him."

"Never!" cried Mab.

"And you love me, Mab?"

"Ah!" she sighed, "I have said it too often—I must say it no more; and yet it is true!" broke from her.

"Mab, you are mine, then; mine by the best right, and I will give you up to none."

"No," sorrowfully said Mab, "I am his; his, by the most undeniable and sacred right—my word of honour. It is my sin and my shame that I ever forgot it. We cannot always control our feelings, but we are masters of our own actions. I feel in my heart that if he betrayed me, as I once thought of betraying him, I should scorn him with unutterable scorn. By that law—a cruel and severe, but just law—I must abide."

"Are you sure you ever loved me?" asked Mr. O'Lally, smiling bitterly.

Mab's tears flowed at the question.

"You can say that," she exclaimed, "you can say it! I have wronged you, I confess it; and yet how different will be our sorrows and our destinies! You will strive anew with the world; and marry another, and forget me, as, I confess, I deserve to be forgotten by you; and to my grave I shall bear the sting of this grief.. Am I sure I loved you? Ah! do you think I do not know that if I had not betrayed myself, because the thought of your danger conquered every other fear—do you think I do not know that you would never have spoken—never would you have tried to win a poor and nameless girl, as I am. You cannot deny it," she added, watching the change that came across his face; "and, since I am giving you up, I will lay my pride at your feet, and confess you were right to aim higher, and that I did not deserve you. Yes, you will do well to marry Miss Gardiner; she loves you, she is rich, well-born, and she has deceived no one. And I—what am I?"

She hid her face in her hands. He removed them, and looked at her very sorrowfully.

"Oh, Mab," he said, "you are a true woman; from accused, you turn judge! But, in my turn, I dare you to deny that I did not love you truly."

"Ah! you did, I know it," she said, sadly. "And, since you have loved me, have mercy on me. I am not strong—I am not sure I could resist you—be strong for me. I have no old blood, no honourable name—God help me!—I have no country, to be proud of—I am nothing, and no one—I have only the conscience Heaven gave me; help me to stand by that! I silenced it; but it speaks now, and it speaks very plainly; its voice is hard and bitter, but it is true, and I must obey it. Help me, Mr. O'Lally. Do not make the girl you once thought worthy of becoming your wife break her word and her honour. Forgive her the wrong she has done you, and give her up, rather than keep her, and despise her in your heart, for the wrong she would do another."

Mr. O'Lally could not resist that appeal. He stooped, he pressed a long last kiss on her pale and trembling lips, and he said,

"Good-bye, Mab. You will marry that man, and I—who knows?—perhaps I shall marry Annie Gardiner. I daresay it was to be, and I believe in destiny. Good-bye, Mab. I shall never love again, nor will you. We dare not—we cannot. It is over for us both—the joy, the fever. Oh! that what is so sweet should not last longer! Good-bye, Mab—that is ended."

He released her gently, and left her. She re-

mained alone in the quiet church-yard, alone among the silent graves. Ay, it was over—the dream, the delight, the young love—it was over, and life remained now—life, dull, tame, and wearisome !

END OF PART THE THIRD.

PART THE FOURTH.

THE COST OF VICTORY.

VOL. III.

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CHAPTER I.

EVERY one was struck with Mab's pale face when she entered Miss Flinn's parlour at tea-time. Miss Emily and Miss Ellen exchanged looks, and Miss Flinn glanced suspiciously at the two sisters; but Doctor Flinn, who knew nothing, and who, as Miss Flinn always told him, was as blind as a beetle, stared at Mab in unfeigned surprise.

"Why, what ails my patient?" he cried.

Mab tried to smile, and, going up to his chair, she said with assumed cheerfulness,

"Your patient is sad at leaving you and your kind home to-morrow, Doctor Flinn; but it must be. And, as she leaves early, accept her cordial thanks this evening."

She held out her hand, and, in his surprise, Doctor Flinn took it without speaking.

"To-morrow!" he cried, at length. "I cannot

allow it ; besides, you must not think of taking such a journey alone."

"Alone!" exclaimed Miss Emily, with something like indignation ; "and do you suppose that our brother would allow Miss Winter to go alone? We all three leave early to-morrow morning, and that is why you see me here this evening, Doctor Flinn."

Doctor Flinn felt silenced, and drank his tea without uttering another word. As soon as the meal was over, Mab rose and went to her room. She was quickly followed by Miss Flinn.

"And so," said that free-spoken lady, "you are going without seeing Mr. O'Lally, after all."

"I have seen him," coldly answered Mab.

"And quarrelled then. That is how you, both of you, want to spoil my love-story."

Mab's eyes lit.

"Quarrelled!" she said. "Quarrelled with Mr. O'Lally! Never!—never!"

"Then, what *is* the matter?" asked Miss Flinn.

But Mab was not going to take that lady into her confidence, and she remained silent.

"You will not tell me?" said Miss Flinn ; "well, I suppose it is natural. Only, you know, I can guess. Since you have not quarrelled, the

mischief lies elsewhere. Perhaps it is something that will pass away."

"No, never!" interrupted Mab.

"Never is nonsense, my dear. It may pass away, I tell you; though, I dare say, your pride would then stand between you and him. Now, child," added Miss Flinn, very softly, "it is a pity it should be so. Why, then, if the obstacle does pass away, why should you not write to me, and let me set all right, and save your pride? Am I not a woman, and do I not know what it is? Ah! if I had had a friend to do for me what I want to do for you, I should not now be Bridget Flinn, my dear."

A gleam of sudden hope shone in Mab's eyes, as she heard this offer. But, though she kindly pressed Miss Flinn's hand, she sighed as she answered,

"Thank you; but it cannot be. All is over, and nothing will ever happen."

"And so my love-story must slip out of my fingers," pathetically remonstrated Miss Flinn; "and he must marry that Annie, who has been angling after him so many years. Ah! you do not like that!"

But, though Mab had been unable to repress a start, her pride would not allow her to confess useless jealousy.

"Let Mr. O'Lally marry whom he pleases," she said, coldly; "I claim no right to interfere."

"Have your way," sighed Miss Flinn—"have your way."

And she left the room, to Mab's relief. Her lot was hard to bear ; but it was best borne in silence. Early the next morning she left—the two sisters accompanying her, as had been agreed. Mab made no opposition to their taking this long and fatiguing journey ; she found it sweet to receive and accept this last proof of Mr. O'Lally's tenderness and affection.

In Dublin they parted, for in Dublin they found Mrs. Norton. She was domiciled in Sackville Street, and extended a hospitable invitation to the sisters ; but both Miss Emily and Miss Ellen thought they would rather leave by the evening train, travel all night, and be at O'Lally's Town to-morrow.

"Have you no message for our brother ?" whispered the gentle Miss Ellen, as she embraced their guest for the last time.

"Tell him my heart is broken," Mab could not help saying. "No, it is useless to trouble him ; tell him to forget me."

They left her. Happy women !—no duty, no adverse fate could divide them from their brother.

As long as life lasted, he was theirs, and they were his.

Mrs. Norton had been unusually silent and observant whilst Mr. O'Lally's sisters were present. She became more communicative when they were gone.

"I need not ask how Ireland agreed with you," she said, giving Mab a sharp look, "your face speaks for itself. Well, I have no doubt O'Lally's Town was a dull place. And those two sisters are evidently poor creatures," compassionately added Mrs. Norton.

"They are very kind, ma'am."

"I have no doubt about it; but not brilliant. They were afraid of me," added Mrs. Norton, compressing her lips, and winking at Mab most significantly; "bless you! I saw at a glance why they would not stay; but I should have done nothing to them," she continued, magnanimously. "Why should I?"

"Why, indeed!" thought Mab.

"At the same time," said Mrs. Norton, putting her hands behind her back, and looking out on the bright and stirring prospect her windows afforded, "I am just as well pleased not to have gone for you. There is only one spot in all Ireland I value, and that is Sackville Street. I would not put a

foot in Ireland if I could not live in Sackville Street," continued Mrs. Norton, warming with her subject; "would you?"

"I have not thought about it, ma'am."

"As for scenery," said Mrs. Norton, waving her hand, "I do not value it—I do not believe in it; it is a stupid invention of tourists and inn-keepers."

Mab did not answer. Mrs. Norton looked hard at her, and said softly,

"Poor little thing! your heart is sore, of course it is. But I do by you as I would be done by—I give you no sympathy, no consolation. When my great trouble came to me, twenty years ago," continued Mrs. Norton, her voice faltering as she spoke, "I said to my friends—'don't pity me, don't—I ask no more. Anything you like, but no pity, no consolation.' And that is why," she added, more calmly, "I do not speak to you of your loss, nor give you what I could not bear myself. And now, my dear, do you wish to see Dublin, or are you ready to leave, say after to-morrow? Speak plainly."

"The sooner we leave the better," replied Mab, almost impetuously.

"Then let it be after to-morrow. I quite understand your feelings, my dear."

So it was decreed, and so it was done. The un-

eventful journey closed on a dull afternoon, a London afternoon, when London is cloudy and gas has to be lit early. Mrs. Norton spoke very little ; Mab was utterly mute ; she looked at nothing, and she saw nothing until her companion said,

“I do believe this is Queen Square.”

Mab looked then. She recognised the trees, the railings, the houses, and said it was Queen Square, but she showed no emotion, she shed no tears. There was no one to receive her at the house, no one to welcome her, save Lucy in deep mourning. The girl looked wistfully at her young mistress as she alighted from the cab. Mab, once so blooming, now wore the settled pallor of a constant grief ; her bright eyes, “that used to look through you like so much light,” as Lucy said, were dull and cold ; her lids were heavy with weeping, and around them extended that pale purple circle which Guido gave to his Beatrice Cenci, which eye-beholders of that sad scene saw in Marie Antoinette when she ascended the scaffold.

The “glad to see you safe home, Miss,” of poor Lucy died on her lips as their looks met. She burst into tears with the easy grief of one whose heart is not reached ; but Mab apathetically paid the cabman, saw her luggage transferred from the roof of the vehicle to the hall, then bidding Lucy close the door, slowly walked upstairs, followed by

Mrs. Norton. That lady had advised her young friend not to return to Queen Square; she had also, when Mab declined her invitation, offered to stay with her until Mr. Ford's return; but Mab had thanked her and frankly replied,

“I am best alone.”

“Of course you are,” answered Mrs. Norton, emphatically. “And yet,” she added, breaking through her own rule of not administering comfort in any wise, “and yet it would do you good to cry.”

“I cannot,” answered Mab, sitting down in the parlour which they had entered, “I cannot.”

“Of course you cannot, of course not. And yet this is not the grief, it is not. Wait till you are a wife, and lose your husband. Then you will taste the very dregs of sorrow and bitterness.”

Mrs. Norton spoke excitedly, as she always did when this subject was touched. But the words wife and husband grated harshly on Mab's ear, and she hastened to entreat Mrs. Norton to partake of some refreshment after their long and fatiguing journey.

But Mrs. Norton would take nothing.

“I only want sleep,” she said, “and so do you, and it is no use making you talk whether you like it or not; so, good night, child.”

She spoke and held out her hand with unusual

kindness ; but nothing could move Mab now, once so impulsive. Apathetically she thanked Mrs. Norton for all her kindness, and apathetically she saw her go. When she found herself alone, almost for the first time since the parting in Shane's Country, the cry of every great sorrow broke from her :

"I cannot bear it!" she moaned to herself, as she wandered over the whole solitary house, seeking her lost peace and happiness. "I cannot bear it!" It was very hard. She had no hope, no illusions. The grief she felt for Miss Lavinia's death, and it was sincere and deep, must and should pass away ; but the dreary void left by her perished love must abide ; for this, time, instead of 'a cure, only brought further sorrow—for time would bring Robert home, and with Robert the fulfilment of her promise. Time would make her Robert's wife—terrible and sickening thought ! Well might she moan again and again,

" I cannot bear it !"

"Do pray have some supper, Miss," urged Lucy, who was gently and noiselessly following her young mistress about, " pray do."

" No, no, nothing," said Mab; " but I cannot stay here," she added with a shudder, for she had entered Miss Lavinia's room, " not here ; let me have a light in the drawing-room."

Lucy obeyed her to the letter ; she brought a solitary waxlight, laid it on the round table in the centre of the room, and withdrew.

“And this is coming home !” thought Mab, looking around her—“this is coming home ! Oh, God, help me !”

She had chosen the drawing-room, because it was the room in the whole house that appealed least to memory. But she found, after a while, that it was haunted too. Here Miss Lavinia had sat and sewed one still evening ; here Robert, the day before their parting, had taken her in his arms, and said, half in jest, half in earnest,

“Be true to me, you little flirt, be true.”

Here Mr. Ford had listened to her playing ; and here, far back in the past, she had seen that pale Mrs. Ford, who had died in the next room, and died asking her to forgive them.

“I suppose her brain was wandering,” thought Mab ; “poor lady ! what had I to forgive ?”

Then she thought of herself, her unknown and, probably, shameful parentage ; then, by a rapid bound, her thoughts flew to O’Lally’s Town, to the meetings by the sea-shore, to the parting in Shane’s Country. In vain she tried to control her thoughts, and recall them—she could not ; she felt the touch of his hand again, again she heard his voice, again her face burned beneath his look, or

her heart felt riven asunder at their separation.

"And I am to marry Robert," she thought, wakening from the dream; "and he, I know it, he will marry Miss Gardiner."

Then hope, sweet syren hope, crept in. Would Robert, when he saw her so altered and so cold, urge an unwelcome suit? Maybe not. But what if, instead of returning speedily, he stayed years away? Youth, love, and the last rays of hope might perish in the meanwhile.

"There is no remedy," sighed Mab—"no remedy—nothing to do but to endure."

Ten struck. Carriages were rolling in the square; the mistress of the house next door was "at home." Mab recognised the notes of one of Strauss's favourite waltzes. It was the very one Miss Lavinia had played on the night of the party. She remembered Frederick Norton. Oh! how her heart smote her now for the pain she had given him! How she thought of his reproachful look! Ay, if she suffered she had deserved to suffer; but, if her sin was great, truly the punishment was severe.

Spite her fatigue, Mab felt no wish to sleep; but she knew that whilst she stayed up, Lucy would not go to bed; so, with an effort, she rang, made the girl shut up the house, and retired to

her own room. When Mab stood once more in that quiet haven, reached after so dreary a storm and wreck, she felt as forlorn as the cast-away, thrown by the angry waves on an unknown shore. Ah! this was not the room she had left months before—the nest that had sheltered her childhood, the bower of her girlish dreams ; that was peopled with a thousand treasures, with illusions, and bright hopes, fled for ever—this was desolate, vacant, and cold. Oh! it was not the same, or, if it were, what a change in her!

Her tears flowed, for the first time since her return ; through her broken sobs, she heard the music next door, but she heard it without bitterness.

“ God will help me to endure,” she thought ; “ for without help I cannot. God will be strong for me, seeing that I am very weak.”

CHAPTER II.

MR. FORD came home late one evening, a few days after Mab's return. She did not see him until the next morning, and when they met they did not utter Miss Lavinia's name. They could not, at first. Mab was utterly depressed, and Mr. Ford was strangely restless. He walked about the room, shaking his white hair, and muttering to himself broken ejaculations, which Mab could not understand.

"You have been ill, uncle," she said, passing her arm within his, and looking anxiously up in his face.

"Never mind, child; that does not matter, nothing would matter if you would only look better—it will come. The boys are gone, and all is gone—the end is coming. Mab, the end is coming."

"What end?" asked Mab.

He shook his white hair again, and did not reply.

Autumn yielded to winter; two months had passed away, and neither letter nor incident had come to break the monotony of Queen Square, when, a few days after Christmas, just as the new year was going to open, Mab, in looking over the newspaper one morning, read the following advertisement:

"On the twenty-seventh instant, at O'Lally's Town, John O'Lally, Esq., to Annie Gardiner, daughter of the late Anthony Gardiner."

Mab put down the paper, and felt very sick and cold.

"How long it is since we have heard from Robert!" exclaimed Mr. Ford, looking up from his share of the *Times*; "not since you came home, Mab."

Mab did not answer. By the despair which had seized her, she knew now how strong her secret hope had been.

"I am afraid you are not well, my dear," said Mr. Ford, looking at her uneasily.

"I am not," gasped Mab, drearily. "Oh, God, help me!—it is too much!—it is too much!"

Mr. Ford looked, as he felt, much alarmed, but he also looked utterly helpless.

"What is it?—what can it be?" he asked.

"I am ill," answered Mab—"unwell, I mean—that is all. Do not trouble about me, uncle; it has been coming on, it will go away again."

She would, she could, say no more. But it did not go away, as Mr. Ford saw plainly. Mab grew thinner and paler daily, and was, at length, only the shadow of her former self. With all that, it was plain that nothing, save grief, ailed her. Mr. Ford vexed his brain with endeavouring to find out the cause of her trouble. He long thought she was fretting for his sister; then for Robert; then at the dulness of her life; but every time he made an attempt to learn the truth or to enliven her, Mab shrank from his questions, or from his kind efforts, until Mr. Ford felt there was a secret between them.

"I am sorry I can do nothing for you, Mab," he said, looking at her wistfully. "I know I cannot understand you, yet I would make you happy if I could."

The humility of his tone smote Mab's heart.

"Dear uncle," she said, twining her arms around his neck, and looking tenderly up in his face, "you are too good to me, and I am ungrateful. But I will try and be better, if it were only for your sake—I will try and be cheerful and patient."

"Will you, Mab?"

"I will, indeed. From this day forward I mean to begin a new life, uncle."

"We shall see, Mab," he answered ; but he still thought, "There is something troubles her, and which she will not tell to me."

Yet Mab spoke sincerely, and meant to keep her word. She schooled her heart, and told it to forget. What was Mr. O'Lally to her now ?—the husband of another woman.

"I have no right to remember him," thought Mab. "He has forgotten me, or given me up very quickly, but he told me he would do so. He is not the man to linger over a lost love; I have no right to complain, and no right to remember him. I must think of Robert—Robert, who, from his silence, is assuredly coming home. I shall never be very happy with him, that cannot be ; but I esteem and like him, and God blesses the duty of a willing heart."

Mab had spent several weeks in comparative calmness, when she, one day, received Mrs. Norton's visit. Mab had not seen her since her return from Ireland, for Mrs. Norton had been visiting some of her friends in the country. She did not believe in scenery, and did not care for it, as we know, but she was certainly fond of motion.

Mab was sewing in the back parlour when Mrs. Norton was shown in. She sat by the window in

the grey light of a dull January afternoon, pale, quiet, and calm. She rose slowly as her visitor entered the room, and put by her work, but her countenance remained dull and cold ; very lifeless and spiritless was her whole aspect.

“ We are going to have some snow,” said Mrs. Norton, sitting down ; “ don’t you think so, Miss Winter ? ” and she looked very hard at her.

Mab glanced at the fragment of sky enclosed by the window panes, and said,

“ Yes, she thought it would snow.”

“ The sun is shining in Australia, of course it is. What opinions have you got on climate, Miss Winter ? ”

“ None, Mrs. Norton. I am too ignorant to have opinions on such matters.”

“ Oh! I have opinions on everything. How long is it since you heard from Robert ? ”

“ It is very long, indeed ; I was in Ireland then ; we think he is coming home.”

Mrs. Norton pursed up her lips, and looked bursting with indignation.

“ Coming home, indeed!” she said, impetuously ; “ well, I can let you into a bit of a secret, Miss Winter. Robert is not coming home.”

Mab’s pale face grew crimson; but, though Mrs. Norton watched her narrowly, she could not say with what emotion.

"I know it from two quarters," she continued: "from my brother-in-law, and from Robert himself. I never had any opinion of that young man," she added, emphatically.

Mab looked at her fixedly, but put no questions.

"And now, are you brave—are you strong?" said Mrs. Norton, rising from her chair and showing much emotion, "can you bear bad news, cruel news, Miss Winter?"

"Yes," answered Mab, rising too, "I can bear anything—you may speak."

"Well, then, Robert and Nelly are married."

It would have been hard to say what Mab felt. She looked more incredulous than amazed at the tidings.

"It cannot be," she said at length, "Robert could not be such a traitor."

"Robert could be anything for money," hotly answered Mrs. Norton; "I always despised that plausible boy, and I always hated that little Judas, Nelly Norton. They are well mated, Miss Winter."

Mab did not answer. She was beginning to believe, and the blow was too great for speech.

"Here is his letter," angrily said Mrs. Norton, handing a closely written sheet to Mab. "He

did not dare to write to you. I scorn him, I do!" she added with a curling lip.

Mab took the letter. It ran thus :

"**MY DEAR AUNT**,—When you receive this all will be over. Think of me as kindly as you can, and break the news to Mab—I dare not. I know Mr. Norton is writing to you, but I do not think he will tell you the fearful alternative he placed before me : ruin for my brothers and myself, or marriage with his daughter. Good, gentle, and loveable as Nelly is, I can say that I sacrificed myself to the welfare of my brothers. Honour, affection, duty bound me to Miss Winter. Did she really love me? I do not think so, but I do not wish to extenuate my error. Tell her that I throw myself on her mercy—it is all I can or dare do."

Mab read no more, though the letter did not end there. She crushed it in her hands and dropped it on the floor, and she said in the bitterness of her heart,

"There is no truth, there is no honour in man. They are wise who betray and break their faith, they are fools who keep their trust."

She left the parlour as she spoke. She went up to her own room ; her brain felt on fire. Until then she had not known real despair, for she had

laid herself as a victim on the altar of duty. But now duty was a dream, sacrifice a folly. She had thrown away her youth and her love in vain. She had tortured her own heart and deeply wounded Mr. O'Lally's for one whose faith gold could buy. She had wept through bitter nights, and pined through days for *that*. Oh ! if Robert had but written earlier! If she had had but a few weeks ! Oh ! time—time boon without price, now lost for ever to her !

She had thrown herself on her bed in the agony of her grief. A knock at her door roused her. She did not answer at first, but Mr. Ford's beseeching "Mab, my darling, let me in," was not to be resisted. She got up and drew back the bolt. His face was troubled and wild. He took her in his arms and pressed her convulsively to his bosom.

"I know all !" he gasped, " Robert is a villain ! She has told me. Oh ! Mab, Mab, my darling, what can I do for you ? If money would but comfort you, you should have it, Mab, for you will be a rich woman yet, you will, though he did not know it."

"Money!" said Mab, drearily, " uncle, give me time, give me three months, and all will be well. You cannot ; then what can you do for me ?"

"Nothing," sadly said Mr. Ford, releasing her

as he spoke, "that is true enough, Mab, I can do nothing for you. You gave me consolation and hope when you came to me a little child, as Alicia lay dead in her room—but I can do nothing for you."

"Oh! uncle," cried Mab, throwing her arms around his neck, "I cannot tell you all to-day, but this much I can tell you, I am not grieving for Robert—I did not love him."

"I am glad of it," cried Mr. Ford excitedly, "Robert is mean and despicable, he never was worthy of you—I am glad you did not care for him. He was incapable of appreciating you, my darling."

He trembled with indignation as he spoke. Mab tried to smile.

"I am not lucky, uncle," she said a little recklessly. "Why should I be? I am poor, a foundling, what is there in me to win love and keep it patient and true? It is just, it is natural that Robert should be faithless, that others should relinquish me on the first sign and seek happiness elsewhere. There never was but one true to me, and that is you, uncle—that is you," she added, again throwing her arms around his neck and laying her cheek to his.

Cruel embrace, and how he would have shrunk from it had he dared!

"All will be well yet, my love," he whispered, "all will be well yet."

"Oh! no, uncle," she sadly answered, "nothing will be well again—never—never!"

"You shall see," he whispered again; "come down with me and let me talk to you."

Mab yielded and went down. He took her into the drawing-room; he made her sit down in an arm-chair by the bright coal fire burning in the grate; he rang for tea, and when it came up he handed her a cup himself; he made her a small slice of toast with his own hands, and begged so hard that she ate it; and whilst he treated her thus like a sick child in need of dainties, he gave her consolation equally childish.

"You will see," he said, with a mysterious smile; "Robert did not know, the mean, 'sordid heart! he did not know how rich my little Mab would be yet. I have worked hard for it, and now it is over, or nearly over Mab, guess how much money you have! I cannot show it you. I did not dare to keep it in the house—but guess."

"Uncle, do not talk so, your goodness breaks my heart."

"My goodness breaks her heart!" said Mr. Ford. "Oh! Mab, do not say that, if you do not want to break my heart. Mab," in a whisper, and

bending to her ear, "you have fifteen thousand pounds."

"Uncle, I have nothing."

"Hush! You have more—you have houses and lands—an estate, Mab, a real estate."

He looked very wild. Mab grew frightened.

"Uncle," she cried, rising, "what is it, what ails you?"

"Hush!" said Mr. Ford, as the church clock struck seven. "I am late as it is, I must go. Oh! my darling, it is for your sake I leave you this evening."

He kissed her again and again.

"Uncle," cried Mab, "stay, stay, do not go—do not leave me! I am frightened!"

But Mr. Ford shook his head, and put her away gently.

"Do not sit up," he said, "I may come in late. There is no fear—I am only going to see a sick man—old Captain George, sick and dying."

"Uncle, do not go, it is a dreary night—it is snowing—do not go!"

"Never mind the snow, child—I must go, death would not wait for me, and he would not see me earlier—good night, my darling."

He kissed her again, and was gone.

CHAPTER III.

IT was a very dreary night. There were not many people out, and the snow lay thick and white on the ground. Mr. Ford turned his back to Holborn, and made his way through the wide and, at that hour, lonely streets which lie beyond Queen Square. He walked on for an hour and more ; at length he reached a poor neighbourhood, with low houses, one story high, and courts and alleys of mean aspect. He entered one of these, groped his way, as best he could, to a tall house, higher than the rest, and rang the second floor bell. After some delay, a slipshod woman, wrapped in a plaid shawl, opened the door with a “Well, sir !” that sounded imperative and sharp.

“Captain George,” said Mr. Ford.

The woman looked exasperated.

“And what is Captain George to me ?” she

said, angrily, "that I should be rung for so night and day, in my sleep and out of my sleep, for the likes of him."

"I am sorry to have troubled you," mildly said Mr. Ford; "I have never been here before, and I thought, from Giachino's account, that Captain George rented the second floor."

"He is in an attic, sir," said the woman, with profound contempt, "in the back attic, and I am surprised that Mrs. Brand would let him have even that—I am. But if you'll come in out of the cold, sir, I am going up-stairs again, and you can have the benefit of my candle."

Mr. Ford accepted this liberal offer, and followed her up-stairs. When they had reached the second floor, the lady in the plaid shawl condescended to hold her light so that he might grope his way up the attic staircase, and, kindly informing him that Captain George's door was the one right opposite him, she re-entered her own rooms and left him in sudden darkness. It did not last long; in answer to his knock, a voice from within said, "Come in," and, opening the door, Mr. Ford entered.

It was a small, bare room. On the table stood a bottle, in the neck of which a candle had been set; it burned unsnuffed, and lit a dreary scene. On a mattress on the floor lay the once luxurious and always comfortable Captain George, and on

the edge of that miserable bed sat a pale, sad-looking young man, with Italian features, the Giachino of old-times, whom Mr. and Mrs. George had befriended, and who had clung to them with canine fidelity. Through him Mr. Ford had received the message that brought him here this evening.

The sick man was sleeping now, at least his heavy lids were closed, and Giachino held up his forefinger to enjoin silence on Mr. Ford; but Captain George's eyes opened wide, and at once caught sight of the visitor.

"It's you, Ford, is it?" he said faintly, "I hardly thought you'd come, though it was for old acquaintance sake. Take a seat; Giachino, hand the gentleman a seat."

Without troubling Giachino so far, Mr. Ford helped himself to the only chair in the room, and, looking down at his old acquaintance, he scanned his hollow cheek and sunken eyes.

"Sad changes, eh!" said Captain George, sighing, "sad changes, Ford. You heard of poor Mrs. George. It was my death-blow, Ford, my death-blow. She had been ailing long; we both nursed her, Giachino and I, and the poor fellow is as tender as a woman, but it would not do. We could not give her the comforts she had been used to, and Mrs. George could not live without comfort. She went off like a baby in Giachino's arms.

And everything has gone from bad to worse since then. The dumb creatures pined and pined away one by one—one after another they went. I do believe they missed Mrs. George. And now they are all gone. The last bird died yesterday, and Captain George is going on his last journey, eh! Ford, his last journey."

"Is there anything you want?—anything I can do for you?" asked Mr. Ford.

"Nothing; Giachino will go back to his own country when I am in my grave—and Captain George will want nothing, and no one then. I thought to ask little Never Mind to take care of a bird for me, but it is provided for. And Giachino wants no one. Poor boy, he will have a good rid-dance of me. He has paid dear for that lame foot of his. Have you not, Giachino?"

"It was all as it should be," sententiously said Giachino.

"Do just listen to him, Ford! Why, Mrs. George might have starved but for Giachino, and I know the poor wretch will beggar himself to give me a decent funeral. I know he will."

There was a tremor in Captain George's voice as he said this. Giachino's faithful love was the only weak spot left in that heart long hardened by inveterate corruption.

"And have you nothing to say to me?" asked

Mr. Ford, unable to repress his nervous impatience.

"An old fox, an old fox!" said Captain George, with the old impudent twinkle in his eye. "Why, yes," he added, slowly, "*I may* have something to say to you."

There was rather a long pause, during which Mr. Ford waited patiently, and Giachino said his beads with perfect apathy to all that was passing around him.

"Some care for the opinion of the world, and some don't," said Captain George, in a hard, deliberate voice; "I cannot say I ever did. Whenever I had money the world went on well with me; and when I had none, it kicked me aside, and treated me as any old worn out cab-horse. As to what it will do or say when I am gone, I really do not care at all. Now, there was James; he was all for having the world's good word, and he got it; but did the world prevent him from being burned alive?—that's what I want to know."

"He left you some money," said Mr. Ford, with much bitterness.

"Why, yes, there were a few thousands—a very few thousands of that inheritance. Well, I made short work of them."

"And is that all you have got to say?" excitedly asked Mr. Ford; "is it all?"

"No—not all. I know what you mean, and I am coming to it. You see James and I got a very fair inheritance some twelve or fourteen years ago, a very fair inheritance."

"I know—I know!" indignantly exclaimed Mr. Ford, nervously clasping his trembling hands.

"Come, old boy, don't go on so—you had five hundred pounds."

"I did not keep one penny of them," cried Mr. Ford, excitedly; "I threw them back to you."

"Ay, but when they had made hundreds and hundreds—you were always double, Ford, always."

"As God hears me, neither I nor mine have touched a farthing of that accursed money!" cried Mr. Ford, his voice rising high in the passion of the moment; "I worked, and we lived by my labour. The money brought in thousands—thousands, and I have them all for her—all; can you say as much, Captain George?"

"No, old fellow," was the candid answer; "every shilling of that money that I could touch is gone, and gone for good, too; but that is not the question. You will easily understand, if you do not know it, that there might be property we could not get hold of, property which would have been our young relative's had she lived. You understand?"

"I do—I do."

"Well, there's an estate, not a large one, but worth something."

"I know all about it," interrupted Mr. Ford ; "and it should have been done long ago, could I have proved her title and her identity."

"That's the rub," said Captain George, making a wry face ; "but I always had a liking for that little thing. I once thought the papers might be useful, and bring in something, though James, who was sharp, said no, and it must not be done. I did not try ; for I got information that convinced me it would just be putting a halter round my own neck, neither more nor less. So I burned the best part of the papers ; and to say the truth, those that remain—and they remained by chance—are not worth much. But one can try ; and I always had a liking for her, and what will it hurt me that they call Captain George a thief and a rascal when he is in his coffin, if he gets one. Not that!" said Captain George, puffing out a breath, "and perhaps she will remember him more kindly for it—not that it will matter much, we are not likely to meet her in the next world, are we ?"

"Why so ?" asked Mr. Ford ; "why so, Captain George ?"

"Why, surely we shall not be where she will go. No—no, it is all fair play—fair play. I have had my fling—fair play. Well, here is the little

packet," he continued, drawing forth a creased and dirty roll of papers from beneath his pillow ; "you will find enough there to settle the case, I believe."

"Perhaps you had better explain," said Mr. Ford, taking the papers with a trembling hand ; "I do not know the whole story."

"Then find it out," angrily replied Captain George. "What! can't a man do a dirty thing but he must rake it up on his deathbed ? You are as bad as Giachino there, who wants to bring me a priest to confess me. Confess!" added Captain George, with a ghastly laugh, "I wonder how long it would take me now to remember all I have done in my day ! A week, a fortnight, and I may not have ten hours to live."

"But you can repent," eagerly said Mr. Ford ; "you can repent, Captain George."

"Tain't easy," candidly answered Captain George ; "take my word for it, John Ford, repentance is dreadfully slow work. No—no," he added, with a significant nod, "as they live, men die. Fair play—all fair play. I dare say I should begin it all again if I had time and opportunity ; and so would you," he added, with another ghastly smile at Mr. Ford, "so would you."

Mr. Ford shook, and stared at Captain George.

"I would not," he said, at length ; "I was led into it."

"So we all are, old fellow. Some by one thing, some by another—most by money; but you would be led into it again."

"I have repented bitterly," said Mr. Ford; "my life has been a burden and a misery to me. God knows, the meanest wretch that starves in the streets is happier than I have been."

Captain George looked at him, then turned his face to the wall, and muttered between his teeth:

"That man was always a sneak. Now, I say it is fair play—fair play."

Mr. Ford rose.

"Is there anything you wish for?" he asked.

"Rum; the doctor says I can have what I like."

"And is that what you think of?" exclaimed Mr. Ford; "have you no other care, no fear?"

"Have done with your preaching," wrathfully interrupted Captain George; "I will stand any amount of it from Giachino there, for if he preaches, God knows and I know the poor lad lives up to it; but from you, John Ford, it is too much. Send me the rum if you like, and let that be all."

"I have deserved this," groaned Mr. Ford; "I have deserved this; even that abject dying wretch can tax me with it—I have deserved it all."

"A sneak—a regular sneak!" said Captain George, with unutterable contempt, as Mr. Ford

turned to the door, and groped his way down-stairs.

The next morning Mr. Ford left Mab. He would not tell her where he was going, and she little suspected that the place of which the memory both bitter and sweet ever haunted her, was the goal of Mr. Ford's journey.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was gloom at O'Lally's Town, and sorrow, which Mab little suspected.

"They are walking together by the sea-shore," thought Mab, on a bright sunny morning, mild as spring. They were not. Mr. O'Lally was sitting in an upper room of the old house, looking at his two sisters. Miss Emily sat by the window—it was securely grated; she looked sullenly and sadly at the sky. Miss Ellen sat on the floor; her hands were clasped around her knees; she was laughing and nodding. The hereditary curse had fallen upon them at last. They had received the taint with their father's blood, and their case was helpless.

It was a very dreary picture. Their madness indeed was gentle. No violence, no unseemly speech, no dismal shrieks, were there

to appal faithful love ; but it was hard to see it daily, and Mr. O'Lally did not know which was hardest to bear, Emily's sullen silence, or Ellen's foolish gladness.

A tap at the door disturbed Mr. O'Lally's sad contemplation ; he rose at once, for he knew it was his wife, who did not dare to show herself, and Miss Emily knew it too ; she gave an uneasy look around the room, and frowned. Her brother went up to her, and kissed her.

"Good-bye," he said, "I am going away. Good-bye, Emily."

But Emily remained mute. Cold, lifeless was her look. Neither tenderness nor endearment could rouse her now.

"Good-bye, Ellen," said Mr. O'Lally, turning to his other sister.

Ellen nodded and laughed.

"I see you," she said, and it was all her answer.

Mr. O'Lally looked at the nurse, who was sitting in a remote corner of the room, sewing quietly.

"Be kind to them, Mrs. Saunders," he said, in a tone of entreaty.

Mrs. Saunders looked up with a smile. She had a calm and gentle face, that seemed to insure kindness, though her clear blue eyes bespoke firmness.

"Of course, sir, I shall be kind," she replied.

Mr. O'Lally sighed ; he could not bear to surrender his two sisters to any authority, however gentle, but the matter was beyond remedy ; he gave them another look, a look full of love and sorrow, then went out on the landing, where his wife was waiting. Her white forehead was clouded, her dark eyes had a look of discontent.

“Annie, what is the matter ?” asked her husband ; his tone was kind and almost tender, but her look did not soften, her features did not relax.

“Why must I not go in ?” she asked, with something like resentment, “what ails your sister Emily ? What have I done that she should hate me ?”

“Would you reproach her with her sad want of reason ?” asked Mr. O'Lally.

“I reproach her with nothing. I only ask what I have done ?”

They were going down-stairs. Mr. O'Lally did not answer till they reached the last step ; he then looked at his wife with something like displeasure.

“We must not speak on this subject, Annie,” he said ; “my sisters are my sore point.”

His lip quivered slightly ; partly with emotion, partly with resentment.

“I meant no harm,” quickly replied his wife,

"but it is bitter to feel myself unjustly hated."

Mr. O'Lally did not reply : he took down his hat, and prepared to go out ; his wife, who was watching him closely, said, in a tone between defiance and humility :

"Am I not to go with you this morning ?"

"Why should you not ?"

"Because you do not ask me."

"Annie, what makes you so submissive ?"

He said it playfully. She did not answer, but stood before him, pouting, with downcast eyes, and, as he felt, looking very handsome.

"You know," he continued, drawing her arm within his, and leading her out into the garden, "that I am no domestic despot, Annie, and have no wish to be one ; I like gentleness, it is true, but it is not that I wish to rule."

"Gentleness !" repeated his wife after him, and stopping short in the garden path. "Gentleness —ay, when it has light eyes and golden hair—like Miss Winter."

Oh ! unwise and imprudent speech ! If there was a face Mr. O'Lally wished to forget, it was Mab's. If there was one he wished to love as well as admire, it was Annie's. But as she spoke there floated past him a vision both bright and sweet. He saw the fair-haired girl, and her radiant look and smile upraised to his, as on that morning

when she came to him beaming with joy that her aunt was saved. His brow flushed and his blood flowed more quickly for a moment, then he turned to his wife, cold, haughty, displeased, and he cast on her a reproving eye, that no longer saw beauty in her face.

“What!” she exclaimed, “is that, too, a sore point, on which I must not touch?”

It may be that if Mr. O’Lally had, before or after marriage, taken his wife into his confidence, and told her the history of his love for Mab, she would not have been so jealous or so resentful; but he had not chosen to give Mab’s secrets into her keeping, and his silence was an offence she could not forgive. He resumed his self-possession, smiled as she uttered her last taunt, and replied, with every appearance of unconcern :

“I am not sure that Miss Winter was very gentle; but you are right enough, Annie, she was, and no doubt is still, exquisitely pretty.”

They soon reached the end of the garden, where his horse was waiting for him, and there they parted, as usual—he to go on to his business, she to return to the house; but Mrs. O’Lally did not do so at once. She stood and looked after her husband, who never turned back, and there was more bitterness in her heart than love in her eyes. Was this what she had toiled for so long and so

patiently? To be thus taunted with the beauty of a preferred rival. For she was a rival; she was sure of it. No one had told her so, his sisters had tried to deny it, but she knew it by that unerring instinct of jealousy and love. Yes, he had loved her, and something had parted them, and she had had what remained of his heart, and was expected to be glad of that remnant. He had slighted her love for years, and, when he took it at last, he was neither humble nor penitent.

In a mood of sullen discontent, Mrs. O'Lally at last turned back to the house. As she did so her eyes sought two grated windows in the upper story, and rested upon them with a moody look. Why was she balked there, too? Why was she hated where she once was loved? She had done her best to please, and must have failed somehow, or Miss Emily would not always turn from her with detestation, in her folly, and Miss Ellen with indifference.

"Everything and everyone is against me," she thought, in the bitterness of her heart.

She entered the house, and, after crossing the hall, the sitting-room. She found the door of this apartment open, and understood why it was so, on seeing a gentleman standing in one of the windows with his back to her. She stood and looked at him with a beating heart. It was not Doctor Flinn,

who was rarely seen at O'Lally's Town since she had become its mistress ; could it be anyone come on her husband's affairs ?—they were in a critical position, and she knew it. She made a slight stir, the stranger turned round, nad displayed the homely features of Mr. John Ford.

Medusa and all her serpents would not have proved a more baleful sight than was this to Annie Gardiner. She turned pale as death, and well-nigh as rigid. Mr. Ford saw her dark eyes dilate, and her small hands clench, and, blunt though his perceptions often were, he was alive to these symptoms of dislike and fear, and he felt confounded to witness them. The words of greeting and congratulation died on his lips, and he stood and stared at his young hostess in mute amazement. She was the first to recover. She did so with a sudden cordiality, which, though well assumed, could not lull Mr. Ford's suspicions. In vain, holding out her hand, she welcomed him with her most winning smile, and addressed him with her most fluent grace—Mr. Ford remained cool, and on his guard. But Mrs. O'Lally would be amiable.

“ You have missed my husband by five minutes,” she said ; “ however, he will be in for dinner ; besides, this is a visit, not a call, of course. And how is dear Miss Winter ? As pretty and as gay

as ever, I trust. I hope she received our cards, though I never got any token that she did so."

"My niece is a little out of health," slowly answered Mr. Ford.

"Then, why did you not let her have the benefit of our mild climate?" asked Mrs. O'Lally, sitting down by him with engaging familiarity. "Mr. O'Lally and I would have been so happy to see her again."

But in vain she looked at him keenly; Mr. Ford, who knew and suspected nothing, could not betray Mab's secret. Mrs. O'Lally changed her ground. She spoke of her sisters-in-law, of their afflicted state; Mr. Ford heard her with concern, but, from the tone of his remarks, it was plain that his cousins had no part in the present visit. He came for Mr. O'Lally, then—what could he want with him? Mrs. O'Lally became confidential. She sighed, her husband had many trials, she feared he was not duly appreciated; her own friends, instead of supporting him, had turned against him. Mr. Ford heard her with great attention; but it was clear as day that Mr. O'Lally's hard battle with the world was not of much more personal importance to Mr. Ford than the Chinese War. No, it was certain he had not come for that.

What, then, had he come for? Mrs. O'Lally tried to discover Mr. Ford's errand during the whole of that long day. She was subtle, keen, and persevering, yet she was completely baffled. Mr. Ford did not even seem aware of her efforts.

It was late when Mr. O'Lally came home. His reception of his self-invited guest was not warm, but it was courteous enough to satisfy Mr. Ford. At once, and with a thoroughly unembarrassed manner, Mr. O'Lally asked after Mab.

"She is not at all well," replied Mr. Ford, with a look full of concern; "I am afraid Ireland did not agree with her. She has never been the same since she came back."

"Miss Winter received a great shock whilst she was here."

"She did; but it looks more than a shock. I used to call her my sunbeam, and my sunbeam is under a cloud now."

Mr. O'Lally seemed satisfied with this, but his wife resumed the subject at dinner-time.

"How sad it was for Miss Winter to be so depressed!" kindly said Annie.

"Well, you see she was used to more society than she has now," replied Mr. Ford. "But her aunt is dead, and the boys are gone, and, as my eldest son, Robert, has married his partner's daugh-

ter, and his brothers are with him, my dear little Mab is not likely to get society just yet."

There was nothing in this speech which Mrs. O'Lally would have noticed, for her suspicions had not rested on Robert Ford, if she had not been struck with the change which passed across her husband's face. He was raising a glass to his lips when Mr. Ford began, he kept it thus whilst he spoke; when Mr. Ford ceased Mr. O'Lally put down the glass untasted, and turned extremely pale. His wife looked at him, with burning eyes, across the table; but he neither saw nor heeded the look, and, for once, his self-possession would not return at his bidding. Mr. Ford stared at him, then at Mrs. O'Lally, and felt, with some surprise, that he was the cause of their singular emotion.

Everything he saw and heard startled and perplexed him; besides, he felt ill at ease, and longed to have his unpleasant errand over.

"Mr. O'Lally," he said, breaking a silence his host shewed no wish to interrupt, "I have not yet told you what brings me here. If both you and Mrs. O'Lally will do me the favour of listening to me after dinner, I shall have time, I hope, to explain to you how and why I must needs add to the cares and anxieties which already press upon you."

"Not this evening, Mr. Ford," said Mr. O'Lally,

rising ; “ I made to-day a business appointment, which I must keep.”

“ Must you go ?” asked his wife.

“ I must, indeed.”

He bade them both good evening, and left at once ; his last words were :

“ I shall not be home till late.”

With some annoyance and uneasiness, Mr. Ford found himself left alone with Mrs. O’Lally. He longed to escape from her, but saw no means of doing so, and indeed she gave him no time. With ill-disguised eagerness, she asked if he would not go to the sitting-room ; and no sooner was he there than she began.

“ Come, Mr. Ford,” she said, playfully, “ I know more than you suspect.”

Mr. Ford looked uneasy ; but he was on his guard, and would not answer.

“ What is all this great mystery for ?” she resumed, with a soft, low laugh ; “ I know quite well what ails Miss Winter.”

Mr. Ford’s wary look became one of deep surprise.

“ She was engaged to your eldest son,” continued Annie ; “ and he proved faithless and married another—that is it, is it not ?”

“ Robert is a villain ! ” cried Mr. Ford, growing excited, as he always did when this subject was

broached ; “a sordid, dishonourable villain, who sold himself for money !”

In his passion he rose, and began walking about the room in his old way, with his hands thrust into his pockets. He thought of Mab’s wrongs, but Annie thought of her husband. The past rose clear before her.

“So that is it,” she said, in a low, hard voice ; “that is it, and that was your errand—to tell him she was free ; pity you came so late, Mr. Ford.”

She laughed very drearily.

“I don’t understand,” faltered Mr. Ford, who, alas, was beginning to understand but too well.

“You do ; and allow me to ask what keeps you here. Mr. O’Lally is married—you can have nothing to say to him now.”

Mr. Ford sat down, and leaning back in his chair, he groaned aloud.

“Oh ! my darling, my darling!—I see it all now. Oh ! God help me ! what a curse we have been to her—father and son. Oh ! God help me !”

His grief was so sudden and so vehement, that, blinded as she was by jealousy, Annie saw she had given knowledge and acquired none. No ; this was not Mr. Ford’s errand. She grew much calmer, and stood by his side, until he raised his troubled face once more.

“I never knew—I never guessed it,” he moaned :

"and now her heart is broken. Oh! why did I send my darling here?"

"I am sorry to have pained you," said Annie, gently; "but I confess I thought your business was about her; and you can scarcely wonder that I should resent it."

"It is about her," replied Mr. Ford, half angrily, for he had never liked Annie; and he almost hated her now that he beheld in her his darling Mab's rival.

"Then what is it?" eagerly asked Mrs. O'Lally, "what is it? Do tell me, Mr. Ford."

Her dark eyes were singularly keen, they looked as if they longed to pick the secret out of his brain, and Mr. Ford felt it, and his resentment rose higher.

"I will not tell you," was his abrupt answer.

"Then you want to be my death!" she cried, passionately; "oh! Mr. Ford, have mercy upon me—have a little mercy! Leave this house before he comes back. Whatever your errand may be, leave it; write; a letter will not do half the mischief—not half. Do not think me mad; he has loved her—he loves her still!" she cried, her voice rising; "did I not see him? and did not you, when you spoke of your son's marriage? Did he not turn pale?—he whose countenance never changes, never yields to emotion! I know what he thought.

He thought—‘I have been in a hurry, I might have had her.’ He thought that ; and I, his wife, saw it and looked on. Have mercy on me, Mr. Ford! I do not know what brings you—but I know it will be my ruin—I know it!”

“My errand may indeed turn against you,” answered Mr. Ford, affected by her vehement entreaties ; “but not as you think. It may make you a poorer woman, but it surely will not lessen—God forbid that it should!—the regard of your husband.”

Mrs. O’Lally seemed unable to comprehend his meaning.

“A poorer woman!” she said ; “how so?”

“I cannot speak unless in your husband’s presence.”

“Will you mention her?”

“I must—I cannot help it.”

She clasped her hands in despair.

“And so you will ruin and undo me,” she moaned, “after what I have told you—you will do it. And he will hear about her, and from her. Where is he now? He had no appointment—none. He is out in the dreary night, out by the shore, thinking of her, calling her, and cursing the day that tied him to me.”

“God help you, poor young thing!” compassionately said Mr. Ford ; “I cannot.”

"Say you will not," cried Mrs. O'Lally, rising from the chair on which she had sunk—"say you will not! May the mercy you have shown me be that you will yourself receive some day."

She left the room as she spoke.

CHAPTER V.

MR. O'LALLY, his wife, and Mr. Ford, were sitting together in the old dark room on the ground floor. Mr. O'Lally looked cool and calm; his wife's hands were clasped tightly together, and her eyes were fastened on Mr. Ford, who was speaking.

"It is now thirteen years since my wife died; some months before her death I found a child at my door. I took her in and adopted her. The world, my wife herself thought she was mine, but she was not. I did not know her real story for some time; when I knew it, redress was out of my power. I had to look on and see the wrong done, for there was a great wrong. She was an orphan and an heiress, the rightful owner of property which could not be contested, and which was shared by two brothers on her supposed death,

They enjoyed it for years, and at length squandered and devoured it."

"And what have we to do with this romantic history of Miss Winter's?" sharply asked Mrs. O'Lally.

"Her name is not Mab Winter," replied Mr. Ford, in a tone as sharp, "but Mary O'Flaherty."

Mr. O'Lally had been expecting this conclusion from the first; his wife was taken by surprise, and exclaimed,

"Mary O'Flaherty is dead, sir!"

"There were two: one, said to have died young, and who was left at my door—the other, who died a few years back in America: they were cousins."

"And why am I to be always haunted with a Mary O'Flaherty—living or dead?" angrily asked Mrs. O'Lally, turning her pale face full on Mr. Ford; "what brings you here with that name and that story?"

"Justice," he calmly answered; "of all that should have been hers, what is left now?—this house and this land."

"Our property—thanks—" derisively said Annie; "what else?"

Mr. Ford did not answer. Mr. O'Lally spoke for the first time.

"What proof of your assertions do you bring?" he asked mistrustfully, for his impression was that

Mr. Ford, having learned Mab's likeness to the dead Mary, had built up this story upon it. Mr. O'Lally believed him guilty of abstracting the five hundred pounds, and was not the man to forget such a transgression.

"When I came here three years ago," answered Mr. Ford, "I came to prove Mab's right. I failed. The knowledge I acquired was broken and unsatisfactory. I need not tell you, Mr. O'Lally, that the Georges had to prove Mab's death before they could touch her inheritance. The way they managed it was this. They got a consumptive child and called her Mary O'Flaherty, and when she died they got the property. They could not have done so, had they not been abetted by the relative who, on her mother's death, went and fetched her from France. He had an interest in serving them, for her decease put him in possession of this very house and land."

Annie's eyes flashed.

"My father!" she said indignantly.

"I can't help it," doggedly replied Mr. Ford; "nor indeed can you. He did it, and without him the Georges could have done nothing. If he had been faithful to the child, she would have been invulnerable; but he was her heir, and he betrayed her. He gave her up to them, and let them do as they pleased. I daresay he never knew what had

become of her, but he knew she was legally dead; and being her heir on the Irish side, as the Georges were on the English through her aunt Mary, he got this property."

"Mr. Ford, assertion is not proof," here observed Mr. O'Lally.

"Of course not. Well, I found it very difficult to get proof. I knew the story; I could follow it as it were, but proof failed. Moreover, it had been so managed that the story had only one weak point, and that was very frail, I am bound to confess. I discovered easily enough the medical man who had attended on the false Mary O'Flaherty, and I got him to describe her to me. I have a letter in which he does so, and his description is that she had a dark complexion and black eyes. Now, Mr. O'Lally, I know you met the real Mary when she was a child—what was she like?"

"Fair, by all means; but allow me to say, that a medical man's testimony, after several years have passed, is of very small value."

"I know it, and never made the least use of it. I hoped, indeed, to confirm it by discovering where Mrs. O'Flaherty had died; for in the same letter this medical man mentions the child's mother as living. Now, I know that she died before the child was in the hands of Mr. Gardiner, and that her death had caused all the mischief; but

the same interest I had in seeking to know had made them careful to conceal, and long and anxiously as I looked, the clue I had hoped for ever escaped me. But you want proof. Here it is. From a mass of papers given me by Captain George on his death-bed, I have extracted this, the only one of any worth, and here it is, as I said. Mr. Gardiner and the Georges were not friends. Mr. Gardiner wanted to borrow money, which Mr. James George would not lend. Mr. Gardiner wrote to Captain George in the following terms :

“ ‘Tell your brother that I have helped him to a magnificent inheritance, and that if he exasperates me, I will ruin myself to ruin him. I give you fair warning, for I owe you no grudge. Tell him I have proofs which will not compromise me.’

“I do not know whether this letter produced any effect,” continued Mr. Ford, folding up the letter once more; “I confess it is the only one of that kind in my hands.”

“A solitary forgery,” scornfully said Annie.

“It may be a forgery as you say, ma’am,” composedly replied Mr. Ford, “but the forger in that case lived in this part of Ireland, for, false or real, that letter still bears the postmark of the neighbouring post town.”

Annie bit her lip and looked at her husband.

Mr. O'Lally had remained very passive. He now spoke.

"Mr. Ford," he said, "I have heard you out patiently. What other proof have you to give?"

"None of much weight, I confess."

"But this is no proof on which you can expect me to give up property which is mine by purchase. No court of law would allow your claims. I grant that this letter was genuine, if you like. What of it? Mr. Gardiner was eccentric and resentful. He may have written it, and yet there may not be a word of truth in it."

"I understand your meaning," replied Mr. Ford; "and as to a court of law, surely you do not think that if I meant to use one against you I should be here! No, I know that in law I could throw doubt upon you and make you suffer in fair name, but I know too I should not get an acre of this land—not one. The case would break down. If I came here it was because I had no right to stay away. I came to tell you what I knew, and leave it to your conscience to keep or surrender the stolen property, of which you unfortunately became possessor."

"You expect my husband to give up his property on the authority of forged documents?" asked Mrs. O'Lally.

But Mr. Ford looked impenetrable to insult.

"I expect him to have a conscience, ma'am," he said phlegmatically, "no more."

Mr. O'Lally frowned.

"Mr. Ford," he said, "my wife is right in one thing : this is no proof on which to surrender what is really mine."

"And what more proof do you want?" asked Mr. Ford ; "is she not the very image of her cousin, a likeness which struck you all, and which she mentioned to me on her return? Is she not like the child you knew? Why, she even remembers you, though, I confess it, very vaguely. When she first came to us, she spoke of a dark youth, and she called him *he*; and she even spoke once to me of a game styled 'Limerick.' "

"She did!" cried Mr. O'Lally, thrown off his guard, as memory suddenly called back the childish incident.

"And is it possible you do not see through this?" asked his wife. "Mr. Ford kindly told you that he came here three years ago to find out by what means he could dispossess you. He procured information, but, not knowing how to make it useful, he sent his sister and Miss Winter. The likeness to Mary O'Flaherty was un hoped-for good fortune. But more was needed. Old childish reminiscences were wormed out of your sisters, and now you see

the use made of them. Is it possible, I say, you do not see through it?"

"Madam!" hotly said Mr. Ford, "I have had patience with you—for I can understand the feelings of a wife and a daughter—but I will not allow you to insult Mab. She is ignorant of the truth—ignorant of my errand; and to this day calls and thinks herself Mab Winter."

"I am glad to hear it, though not surprised," said Mr. O'Lally; "I should think it strange indeed if Miss Winter had any share in the step you have taken, for, whether your assertions be true or not, I agree with my wife, your proceedings have not been frank. The whole story you relate is strange, and I warn you that I will sift it to the very bottom. I will not surrender house and land, and my wife's father's good name to boot, without a struggle."

"Do your best, you will disprove nothing that I have said," said Mr. Ford rising; "I have convinced others who had not the same cause to be sceptical as you have, it is true, for Mary O'Flaherty's brother had no inheritance at stake. I went and found him in America, hoping he might give me some information, but he knew nothing, yet he believed me, though he never saw Mab. But he was very sore against you, Mr. O'Lally—and not without cause, if his story be true. You

made love to his sister—but she was poor, and you deserted her. You need not look so desperately angry, it is nothing to me; and take pattern on me, Mr. O'Lally ; for the last hour I have heard myself insulted with a patience I did not know was in me. However, that is neither here nor there. I was in America when my sister died, and Mr. O'Flaherty told me his story, or rather his sister's. It seems he had not known it very long, but looking over her papers he found a letter of yours, endorsed by her—so he told me. He put it under an envelope, and bade me give it you with a message which is bitter enough. ‘Tell him,’ he said—but I will not repeat the rest,” added Mr. Ford, breaking off, “for I did not promise to do so—though I did promise to give you the letter—and here it is.”

He handed him a sealed packet as he spoke. Mr. O'Lally took it haughtily enough.

“I perceive, Mr. Ford,” he said, “that none of my affairs are to remain secret to you. You claim my property; you attack my late father-in-law’s honour, and you are kind enough to give me your opinion of my conduct in a very private matter of mine which occurred several years ago.”

Mr. Ford did not reply. He was looking at Mrs. O'Lally. She sat bending forward, her hands clenched, her eyes fixed on the sealed letter

in her husband's hand. Mr. O'Lally saw it too, and, looking at her with some wonder, he gently asked,

"What ails you, Annie?"

"Do you love me?" she replied.

"I hope so."

"Then prove it. Cast away that letter brought by one who came to despoil us of our home, and who would poison it if he could. Trample it under your feet with the scorn it deserves, and bid him begone!"

She had risen, and she spoke with a passion of mingled love and scorn that made her very beautiful. Never had her husband seen that light in her eyes, that bloom on her cheek, that glow in her whole aspect. He was dazzled and moved, but he was not conquered. He passed his arm around her, and leading her away to the window, he tried to soothe her.

"My dearest Annie," he said, "be calm, and have some faith in your husband. That poor girl has been dead years, and long before she died my love, if ever it was love, was killed by her fickleness. Do not wrong yourself so far as to be jealous of her, and know that, even when I preferred her, my better judgment bade me prefer you."

The room was large, and Mr. O'Lally spoke too low for Mr. Ford to hear him, but he heard his

wife's reply. Looking up in her husband's face, she said in tones of the most ardent entreaty,

"If you love me do not read that letter—you preferred her once—years ago—well, I confess I am jealous of that. Gratify me. Ah! remember," she added with a passionate outbreak, "remember that I have suffered very keenly—and gratify me—for once—I shall never trouble, never tease you again—not even about that other Mary O'Flaherty."

She spoke with a persuasive tenderness that moved him very much, that moved him all the more that he had not married her for love, and that their short married life had known many storms—but he did not yield, nor feel tempted to do so.

"Annie, be just," he said; "my honour is attacked, and an insulting message is sent to me. That it is all through some strange error which I can clear I do not doubt; for Richard O'Flaherty is not a bad man—but I will clear that error, Annie. It must not be said of your husband that he was so base as to wrong an innocent girl."

He put her away and walked back to Mr. Ford. She remained where he left her: she stood there cold and pale, hardening herself to meet her inevitable destiny. Mr. O'Lally tore open the envelope, and a square letter with a red seal fell out, a

letter which, as it seemed to Mr. Ford, he had seen before.

Mr. O'Lally recognised it too ; he looked at it ; two faint lines were traced in pencil on the back of the envelope ; they were in a writing once familiar. "When I read this," they said, "I felt my heart was broken."

Mr. O'Lally hastily unfolded the letter and read its contents : they were brief, and in his handwriting. Yes, he could not doubt it : that cruel, cold intimation, that he had reflected, and that all was over between him and Mary O'Flaherty, had been written under his own hand and seal. She had acted upon his wishes, complained to none, and borne her hard lot in silence, until her heart broke. The mist which had so long clouded the past rolled away from Mr. O'Lally's view. That first Mary, then, though too easily deceived, and too easily acting on her resentment, was not fickle or faithless. If he was blameless she was innocent. Malice alone had divided them—malice, which must also have been domestic treason.

Calmly enough he turned to his wife. Her look, her attitude, both proclaimed her guilty.

"It is false!" she said, forestalling attack, "it is false!"

"Annie, Annie, God forgive you!" said her husband with deep sorrow. "Oh ! how could you

do it? What was ruin, what were house and land to this?"

He sat down like one overwhelmed by grief. That was his first feeling; but when he remembered the story of that letter—how Mr. Ford had found it in the study where he had seen her: how, to disarm his testimony of its value, she had not scrupled to cast upon him the ignominy of theft; when he remembered too, that if he had been wildly loved, he had been shamefully duped and deceived, bitter resentment conquered grief. He rose, he looked at her, and she knew his face and his eye too well not to read in both her destiny. It may be that, according to the theory of love, Mr. O'Lally's wife ought never to have loved him more than in that moment. But if she was the guilty daughter of a guilty father, she came of a proud and vindictive race, that had never forgiven humiliation, even though merited. Her face took the fatal beauty of the Medusa as she looked at her husband. Manifold were her wrongs. She had loved him years, and he had never returned her passion. Twice before her face, under her very eyes, he had loved those two Marys, who both had proved her undoing. He had married her for ambition, and though she could not tax him with unkindness, she did with indifference. And now, this very day, what had he not done? He had

humbled her in the presence of that stranger who had come to claim her inheritance for a hated rival, and who could go back to her with the story of her disgrace. She forgot her own deep guilt, and spoke with the resentment of an injured woman.

"You may spare yourself the trouble of speaking," she said, addressing her husband, "you married me for my money, and I scorn it too much not to leave it to you—keep it!" she added with a gesture full of disdain. "But when I leave this house, which once was mine, which you have made hateful to me, and which you are going to surrender to an adventuress, I leave it with a revenge you little suspect, but shall know some day."

She walked haughtily to the door, opened it, and closed it again as calmly as if it had not for ever divided her from her husband. A deep silence followed her departure. Mr. Ford stood amazed and aghast at the ruin he had caused; Mr. O'Lally smiled bitterly at his wife's parting address. The last illusion was gone. She had never loved him—never. It had been passion and pride, and a wish to prevail over him, but never had it been love. And even if it had been, did he not feel in his soul that he scorned, he abhorred the love built upon treason? The less he felt love himself, the more he needed esteem. Esteem! And forgery, and trust betrayed, and confidence de-

ceived, rose before him in their black array. To these he was wedded. He bit his lip and looked angrily at Mr. Ford.

"Well, sir," he said sharply, "what more do you want?"

"Nothing," answered Mr. Ford; "God knows, I little suspected what I was doing."

Mr. O'Lally's face darkened.

"You come with a strange story," he said in the same sharp, brief tone. "I warn you that I shall sift it thoroughly, and, until I know more, this house and land are mine, and I give you no credit."

"You will do as you please," replied Mr. Ford. "This house and this land are not yours—they are Mab's; but you may keep them if you like. I have told you I will not go to law with you—I have saved up some money for her, and she can live without O'Lally's Town. So far as I can see," continued Mr. Ford, bluntly, "ill-gotten goods are no great gain to their owners."

Mr. O'Lally looked sternly at him; but Mr. Ford's blood was up—he thought of Mab, and would have snapped his fingers at a king in the defence of her rights. Mr. O'Lally, however, did not deign to answer his taunt, and Mr. Ford, having said his say, took his hat and walked out. He felt

excited, and the scene he had just witnessed was not calculated to calm him. He walked through the garden and the grounds until he reached the gate that led into the country. He let himself out, and, thrusting his hands in his pockets, walked at a swift pace, talking and muttering to himself. A rustling sound made him look round ; it was Annie's silk dress, and close behind him stood the unhappy lady. She wore a small velvet hat and feather ; her dress was elegant and tasteful, the attire of a rich woman, who, though alone, is protected by the respect and deference of all ; but Mr. Ford needed no second look to know that she had left her husband's house for ever. Annie Gardiner was terrible to look at in her despair. Her eyes were sunken, her lips parched and parted, her brow rigid. The sight of Mr. Ford seemed to rouse all her passion once more.

"I told you you would be my ruin," she said, "I told you you would. When you first entered that house I felt misery and woe coming in with you—it is written in your face, it is ; and now you will go back to her—she will triumph in my humiliation, and boast that she still rules the heart of my husband ; let her—he is my husband—and until I die, mine, and not hers. Even now, tell her that even now it is a sin and a shame for her to think of him."

"God forgive you—God forgive us all!" said Mr. Ford, with a heavy heart.

"How dare you ask God to forgive me?" she cried, turning upon him. "How dare you? I will not be pitied! Pity me if you dare!"

Mr. Ford would pity, and he would counsel too.

"You are very young," he said gently, "all cannot be over between Mr. O'Lally and you."

A gesture full of scorn was her answer.

"I have forbidden you to pity me," she replied; "and I now bid you pity yourself. You were born for your own undoing, Mr. Ford, and for the ruin of all who come near you."

She did not wait for an answer, but, brushing past him, walked on, and struck into a narrow path. Mr. Ford made no attempt to follow her. There was a sting in her last words, and in his inner heart he felt their bitter truth. Ay, that was his destiny: to mar where he meddled, and ruin what he loved. Who knew it better than John Ford?

CHAPTER VI.

EXACTLY a week after his conversation with Mr. O'Lally, Mr. Ford made his appearance in Queen Square. He came in the evening, and found Mab sitting alone in the drawing-room. She looked both pensive and melancholy, and Mr. Ford now knew why she looked thus. His heart ached as he gazed on her sad face, which the joy of his return only lighted up a while, and his courage sank as he thought of all he had to tell her.

“Mab, my darling,” he said, with a sigh, “play me something.”

Mab’s heart felt very heavy for music, but she obeyed. She played Mr. Ford his favourite piece from Mozart. When the last notes of the

Agnus Dei had died away, Mr. Ford sighed again, and said, "Mab, come here!"

Mab went, and thought to sit by him, but he motioned her away.

"Not there," he said; "no, on the other side of that table. Mab, I have much to say to you."

There was a pause; then Mr. Ford resumed:

"Mab," he said, "have you ever wondered who and what you were? Have you ever conjectured what your real story might be?"

Long as Mab had been with Mr. Ford, this was the first time that this subject rose between them. She looked up suddenly, but his eyes were downcast and shaded by his hand, and his face gave her no clue to his meaning.

"I have wondered," she answered, "but scarcely conjectured."

"I had," said Mr. Ford; "but no proof, though suspicion amounted to certainty. Now proof has come."

Mab rose to her feet with great emotion.

"Are my parents living?" she asked.

"No: your father died before you were born, your mother long before you were left at my door."

Mab sat down again—all her wild hopes of kindred and affection suddenly quenched within her. The rest seemed a matter of no moment.

"You were born in Ireland, of Irish parents," resumed Mr. Ford, "and your name is Mary O'Flaherty, and O'Lally's Town is yours, and never was Miss Gardiner's."

The burning blood rushed up to Mab's face, then went back to her heart, and left her pale as death.

"I know what you are thinking of," resumed Mr. Ford; "yes, it was Mr. O'Lally whom you knew as a child before your mother died. I told him so, and he still remembered you."

Mab pressed her throbbing forehead between her hands.

"But why was all this?" she asked; "why was I left at your door, cast on your charity?"

"Hush! for God's sake!" he interrupted. "I will tell you all, but do not use words like these—words that kill me. If you had had none but that Irish property, such as it is, I daresay you would have been allowed to enjoy it in peace; but an aunt of yours married a rich Englishman to whom I was related—his name was George, and the Georges were his nearest relatives. But old Mr. George—for he was old—was not fond of them, and he left every farthing he had to his young wife. She died soon after him, and bequeathed all she had to you, and in case you died before

coming of age, to her husband's nearest relations, Captain George and his brother James."

Mab looked up.

"Yes," said Mr. Ford, "that is it. Three men were interested in your death—Mr. Gardiner, whom it would entitle to the property at O'Lally's Town, and the two Georges; and these three men found means, which I never was able to clear up, to make you pass for dead in the eyes of the law. They plundered you, and it pleased Providence that they should do so with impunity. In a carriage, bought with your own money, Mab, Captain George drove up to this door, and, in deep mourning for you, he gave you a doll. I believe that was the man's way."

"But, uncle," said Mab, almost incredulously, "how could they do all this?"

"God knows! I do not, child. I have spent years to discover it, and I have learned little or nothing. They were cunning as well as strong. They gave legal proof of the death of a consumptive child, and they said that child was Mary O'Flaherty, the heiress. There was no one to gainsay them, to investigate, or to inquire, for no one had any interest in the matter; and so Mr. Gardiner got the land, and the Georges the money."

Mab's face fell.

“Uncle,” she said, sadly, “there is some mistake—I am not Mary O’Flaherty, I am Mab Winter.”

“You are Mary O’Flaherty,” replied Mr. Ford, very drearily. “Captain George never actually denied it, and he confessed it to me the other night on his death-bed. You are Mary O’Flaherty, though to this day I cannot prove it. And yet how I did search, Mab!—but they were too cunning for me. I never had a chance of justice. Oh! Mab, it has been very hard to see them enjoying and squandering your wealth. Well, they did not thrive upon it. How could they? Captain George died the other day in a garret, and you know his brother’s end. With him perished his accomplice, Mary——”

“I remember Mary,” interrupted Mab.

“Yes, it was she left you at my door. They bought her too. You may well look frightened, Mab. You did not know what money could do—how far it could sink souls into sin. It is frightful—it is very frightful! But the curse of gold rested on them all—on them all, Mab. It rested upon them in life as in death. I have always suspected that the wife of James George was his accomplice. Well, husband and wife thought it necessary to use Mary, and what happened? Mrs. George was middle-aged and plain, and Mary was

young and handsome. Her master liked her, and her mistress did not dare to complain. A rival, insolent and strong, rose up in her own home, and literally broke her heart. And the curse of gold fell on them too. Mr. George took a journey to India, and whilst he was away his daughter was born. He could not come back, and by marrying the mother make this, his only child, his lawful heiress. That child was the only creature he ever loved; he could leave her money, but he dare not acknowledge her—he dare not be proud of her, and she promised to be beautiful. Well, she was innocent, and therefore God was merciful to her, for she died young and escaped it all. You know how Mary and her master ended. It was hard to see Captain George enjoy what was left of your plunder, but I had to bear it, Mab. Well, he repented in some fashion, for it is thanks to him that you now have O'Lally's Town."

"What!" cried Mab.

"Yes, it is yours now. I would not have gone to law about it, but I told Mr. O'Lally your story, and, Mab, behold God's justice! He bade his attorney tell me that your claim was just, and that papers which had come into his possession by marriage, proved it to him beyond a doubt, though never before had he been able to understand their

meaning. Yes, Mab, I have that triumph at least. O'Lally's Town is yours."

And rising, Mr. Ford walked about the room in his old way. But Mab looked both grieved and indignant.

"It is his," she said ; "he bought it—it is his!"

Mr. Ford stopped short, and looked at her.

"Mab, do not wish him to keep it—the iniquity that clings to that house and land has brought ruin with it. Mr. O'Lally is all but a penniless man—I know it through Docter Flinn—through every one. His marriage has proved his undoing—for it has given him a new set of enemies in his wife's relatives. All his enterprises have failed one after the other. The red house is shut up, he has sold his wife's land to pay his debts, and the greatest of all his misfortunes is having that wife herself. When I went to O'Lally's Town, some years ago, Mr. O'Lally was going to marry your cousin and namesake, Mary. Miss Gardiner, the worthy daughter of a guilty father, forged a letter that divided them. I tell you, Mab, it is God's justice. I went on your business, and I detected her ; I went on your business again, and I exposed her. I neither wished nor meant it, but I did it, and she has fled from her husband, and no one knows where she is now. They have not been married six months, and they are divided for

ever ; and through whom, Mab ?—through you—through you !”

He spoke excitedly, but Mab, though bewildered at all he said, had but one prevailing thought.

“ Uncle,” she asked, “ where is Mr. O’Lally ?”

“ God knows, child ; he has left both O’Lally’s Town and Ireland, but no one knows where he is. He has taken his sisters with him—did I tell you they are both insane ?”

Mab clasped her hands with something like despair. Mr. O’Lally was poor, forsaken, afflicted, and it was in the hour of his adversity that her claims had been urged to deprive him of his home.

“ Oh ! uncle,” she cried, “ how could you do it ?—how could you take his last refuge from him—that house which his sisters bought for him—which was truly and really his ?”

“ It is yours, not his, Mab,” rather sharply answered Mr. Ford ; “ and it has been yours all these years.”

“ Oh ! why did you not tell me so before ?” she cried. “ Oh ! time, time, why was I denied a little time ?”

She threw herself across the table, and clasping her hands above her head, moaned aloud in the bitterness of her grief. Pitifully did Mr. Ford look at her. He knew the meaning of her reproaches, and he felt them in all their keenness.

At length Mab looked up ; she rose, she came to his side, and she spoke in a tone both humbled and penitent.

“ Uncle, forgive me, but it put me beside myself to think of what might have been ; besides, I cannot bear robbing Mr. O’Lally. I cannot bear it. Forgive me speaking so hastily, uncle, pray forgive me !”

“ Forgive you ! Oh ! Mab, if you knew all.”

“ Uncle, what can there be to know ? You may tell me what you please now. I can defy the rest.”

Mr. Ford sighed.

“ Mab,” he said, “ you had three enemies. I told you so. You had a fourth, too. Well, the curse of ill-gotten gold has fallen on him also, Mab. Oh ! Mab, do you know who that fourth enemy is ?—Mab, his name is John Ford.”

“ You, uncle!—you!”

“ You do not ask why you were left at my door ! I believe you owed that to Captain George. Bad though the man was, he would not cast you forth as a beggar on the streets. So you were left on the steps of this house, with five hundred pounds pinned to your cloak. It was a time of bitter need for me, so I was tempted, and I yielded to the temptation. Early investigation might have availed. I made none. I sought to know nothing.

When I repented it was too late, I was in their power, and they could defy me, as they did. Thus you see, Mab, how my guilty weakness made me your fourth and most terrible enemy. And now, Mab, you know all, or almost all, and the end has come, and I have lived to see you partly righted, and, God help me! to feel shame before you. It does not matter; I am used up now, and shall not last long. It was *that* kept me up. You will never know how I toiled to repair my error. Now I am helpless. I can see that my wrong-doing has deprived you of more than an inheritance. I suppose it interfered between you and Mr. O'Lally. Robert, too, was false to you. Like father, like son. Your happiness is wrecked, Mab. Your cry for ‘time! time!’ has pierced my very heart. Poor little Mab! He who seemed to cherish you was your bitter foe. Oh! Mab, how was it? What was there between you and Mr. O'Lally?”

“For God’s sake, do not question me!” cried Mab, “do not—do not! I am wretched—very miserable, and I do not know what I might say in the bitterness of my heart. Do not question me.”

There was a long silence. Whilst it lasted Mr. Ford drank the dregs of the bitter cup he had been slowly quaffing since the day when his wife had died. Mab felt resentment against him. He had wronged her cruelly, and she had suffered

cruelly, and resentment, natural, though very hard to bear, had entered her heart. Everythihg else he could have borne; this, though anticipated, he found intolerable. He rose to leave the room, but Mab rose too, and, throwing her arms around his neck, said tenderly,

“Dear uncle, do not mind me—do not! Only I cannot bear it about Mr. O’Lally—it breaks my heart.”

Mr. Ford hung his head and sighed. Had he given years and sleepless nights!—had he watched and prayed, and hoped against all hope—and all to work out this atonement—and was it to end thus? Was his darling to be none the happier for all his striving? Was she to utter those cruel words, “It breaks my heart”?

“Uncle,” she asked after a while, “are you sure no one knows where Mr. O’Lally is gone to?”

“Yes, Mab, very sure.”

She sighed, kissed him, and went up to her room. When she came down the next morning she was much more calm.

“Will you like to live at O’Lally’s Town, uncle?” she asked.

Mr. Ford brightened up at once.

“I shall like any place where you are,” he replied cheerfully.

"It will be farther from the boys, uncle."

Mr. Ford shook his head.

"The boys have left the nest, Mab. It is all over between them and me—all over."

Thus it was decided. A bill was put up in the house in Queen Square, and Mab and Mr. Ford left it on a chill and cheerless morning.

They travelled slowly, and four days later they arrived at O'Lally's Town. Mab was not expected, and the house was shut up. A wintry sun lit its gloomy front and shone on the window panes. A messenger had been sent for the keys, and whilst they waited his return Mab and Mr. Ford sat down on the steps of the front door. Mab remembered her arrival, her aunt, and the smiling twin sisters. Where were they now? One in her grave in the mountains, the other two, clouded for ever in intellect, poor helpless women, were wandering somewhere with their brother. And where and what was he? A wrecked man of twenty-seven, foiled in ambition, in marriage, and in love. And where was Annie Gardiner, the once handsome heiress, now a rejected, unloved wife?

"Oh, life! life!" thought Mab. "And I am not twenty one!" was her next inward cry.

"Here is some one coming," said Mr. Ford. The garden gate opened, and Honour, for whom a boy had been despatched, appeared with a bunch

of keys in her hand. She came slowly towards them. As she walked up the path between the two lawns, Mab noticed the constrained and clouded expression of her countenance. "Poor girl," thought Mab, "she cannot find it in her heart to welcome me." Very cold and awkward indeed was Honour's greeting, and especially did it include much unnecessary explanation about the keys, one of which was unaccountably missing; "but it will be found, Miss," very earnestly assured Honour.

The door was opened, and they entered the house. Honour threw back the shutters, and the pale sunlight poured in, and lit up the chill, gloomy rooms. Nothing was changed. A look told Mab that Mr. O'Lally had left everything behind him. She found his books, his guns, his fishing-rods; she found his sisters' little knick-knacks in their rooms; she found his wife's room, too, as that wife had left it on the evening of her flight, with a dress thrown on a chair, and the toilet-table still covered with its dainty fittings out, bright and sparkling in their bridal newness.

Involuntary jealousy filled Mab's heart. Oh! how soon and how manlike he had given her up for another! And had not that other been loved, even though it were only for a day, whilst she bore her hard fate alone? Ay! a few days Annie Gardiner

must have had ; “ and I,” thought Mab, “ had I ever a moment that was not embittered by remorse or fear ?”

“ Does any one know where Mrs. O’Lally is now ?” she asked, turning to Honour. “ I should like to send these things to her.”

“ No, Miss,” replied Honour, looking hard at Mab, and speaking slowly ; “ but I don’t think she wants any of these dresses and things where she is.”

“ What do you mean ?” asked Mab, much startled.

“ Why, Miss, I only say what other people say, that Mrs. O’Lally threw herself into the bottomless loch ; and some say that she did it that her body might not be found, and her husband never be able to marry again.”

Mab turned sick and faint, and leaving this dreary room, she locked it, and resolved to enter it no more.

“ And now,” she said, carelessly, “ I want to go out by the sea awhile ; give me the key of the garden gate.”

Honour handed it to her with a compassionate look. It was not hard for her to read the story of Mab’s pale face and sad eyes. She had seen her fresh and gay as the morning go out to the sea-shore to meet Mr. O’Lally—for what do not ser-

wants see and know?—and now sad, dispirited, and wan, what was she going there for but to torture and vex her own heart with the memory of what had been and could be no more.

She went, she ran through the garden alleys, with the eagerness of long-repressed desire; she opened the door with a trembling hand, she looked out at the full green sea beating with its edge of foam against that desert shore. In the fulness of her grief she called aloud, she bade him come. It was not Annie's husband she wanted—he was dead to her, dead and gone; it was Mr. O'Lally, her lover, by whose side she had sat, in whose hand her hand had been clasped, who for a few days at least had been her own, fond, adoring, and true—hers as she had been his. But it would be too sweet if passion could deceive us, and keep us in that high mood akin to madness in its delusions, though not in its horrors. Cold, keen as the chill sea-breeze which blew around her returned reality. Willingly, deliberately Mr. O'Lally had set between them an impassable barrier—his ill-fated marriage divided them for ever, and bade her forget. "And I must, I must," thought Mab. "Oh! that God would give me strength!" Sadly, humbly she turned back. As she entered the garden, she met Mr. Ford, who had come looking for her, restless and uneasy.

"I wanted to look at the sea, uncle," said Mab, trying to smile.

"Dinner is ready," replied Mr. Ford, looking at her very earnestly.

She went in with him, and forced herself to eat a little, in order to please him. Night had set in. There was a bright fire in the sitting-room, and Honour brought in the moderator lamp, and set it on the table. Mr. Ford drew close to the fireside and rubbed his hands, and tried to look cheerful. Mab stood by his side silent, and, as he could see, very sad. He did not question her, but he watched the direction of her eyes—they were fixed on a print above the fireplace ; and how deep and intent was their gaze. He, too, saw the likeness, and though he could not know how vivid a picture of another evening that image brought back to Mab, he felt it was not to O'Lally's Town she should have come if she wished to forget.

But did she wish to forget ? Alas ! no, it was too true that in her heart of hearts Mab wished to remember.

CHAPTER VII.

IT was thus Mab settled in her new home. She was coldly received at first, for her story was thought strange and doubtful ; but as time passed the prejudice against her gave way to sympathy, and in several instances to admiration, for Mab was young, good-looking, and not poor, but vanity and its pleasures were dead, and Mab remained at home and led the dullest of dull lives whilst years went by.

Mr. Ford was disappointed. It was hard that Mab would not marry.

“That is what she wants, you see,” he reasoned with himself. “I am no society for her, of course not—a dull, broken-spirited old man, what should she care for me ? She is fond of me, dear little Mab, I know it, but I am not enough for her. She wants a husband, another Mr. O’Lally,

a home and children in it. What a pity she can fancy none of these fine young fellows who are all after her! There are two or three of them a good deal handsomer and more agreeable than that Bonaparte O'Lally; but it's all fancy, you see—all fancy, and she had set her fancy upon him. I wonder if she would like young Norton? She used to like him.

Mr. Ford set his wits to work, and they worked to such purpose that before the month was out Frederick Norton had made his appearance at O'Lally's Town. Mab's reception of him was cordial, though to her his visit was unexpected, but Mr. Ford's was enthusiastic. He looked at him with admiring and delighted eyes, and no sooner did they remain alone after dinner than Mr. Ford's attack began.

"Now, Mr. Norton," he said, in his old jaunty way, "just taste that Bordeaux, and tell me what you think of it? Let me tell you the mistress of the house has a pretty good cellar, though the little puss will not taste anything herself but water."

Without waiting for the guest's reply, Mr. Ford filled his glass and drained it. Doctor Flinn had ordered him to take wine, for he had shown signs of great debility, and the result was that Mr. Ford sometimes forgot his old sobriety.

"How do you think Mab is looking?" he resumed.

"Miss Winter—Miss O'Flaherty, I mean—will always look well."

Mr. Ford bowed his head, and his tears flowed.

"Marry her, Frederick," he said, plaintively. "Robert was a villain, and she was too good for him. But you are a good fellow, Fred—I like you—marry her, she is as handsome as ever, if you look at her well. Why, all the young men here are mad to have her, and she is rich now—marry her, Fred, there is a good fellow!"

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Ford," rather sharply replied Frederick Norton, "for your good opinion of me, but I can read a woman's face now, and Miss O'Flaherty's is not to be misunderstood—I do not know if she will ever marry, but I am very certain I should not be the favoured man."

"You cannot say if you will not try," plaintively urged Mr. Ford. "I wish you would try, Fred. Push me the bottle."

But Fred, who began to perceive how matters stood, denied Mr. Ford's request, and insisted on joining Mab, who merely noticed Mr. Ford's prudent silence, and fortunately remained unconscious of his real condition.

By the next morning Mr. Ford had forgotten how far he had gone, but he had not forgotten his

secret purpose. To heighten Mab's charms, he took Mr. Norton over the estate, and whilst he pointed out fine views and romantic scenery, he dropped broad hints concerning the rent-roll ; but Frederick Norton heard him with polite indifference—he had not grown mercenary. Mr. Ford took other means. He left him alone with Mab. He stole away on shallow pretences, chuckling, with his hands in his pockets, and taking care not to come back.

This plan, old-fashioned and worn-out as it might seem, nearly proved successful. Involuntarily Mr. Norton felt the seduction which a once loved woman rarely fails to exercise over a man's heart. Mab was altered, she had lost the rosy bloom of early youth, but she was lovely still, and she had gained charms more subtle and more delicate than those of which years had robbed her. How dreamy and how soft was the look of those large dark grey eyes, that ever seemed to be seeking a lost image ; how tender a grace there lingered in her smile, how sweet were the tones of her once gay voice ! Ay ! Frederick Norton soon felt it, the woman who had loved and suffered might be more dangerous than the blooming and thoughtless girl. The temptation of consoling so fair-looking a mourner came over the young man's still susceptible heart. Once or twice he looked at Mab with that dawn of

tenderness which is not beyond respect, but which no woman mistakes. The sudden cloud that crossed her face, the pain, the constraint he read there, confirmed him in what he had said to Mr. Ford. He was not to be the man, and as with the knowledge of reading feelings had come that prudence which is the guard of strength, he promptly resolved to shorten this dangerous visit, and escape his threatened relapse. A letter came. Frederick Norton pleaded urgent business, resisted all Mr. Ford's outcries and laments, and was gone ere he had fairly recovered from so severe a blow. With a darkened face, Mr. Ford turned back towards the house, as the wheels of the jaunting car rolled away along the road.

"Oh! Mab," he exclaimed with a reproachful sigh, "Frederick would have stayed if you had liked. I am sure he loves you still."

Mab did not answer.

"Mab! Mab!" excitedly cried Mr. Ford, "are you engaged to him? Say you are, Mab. Oh! say you are!"

"Dear uncle," replied Mab, laying her hand on his shoulder, and looking kindly in his face, "I am best so—I have not rejected Mr. Norton—he has not asked me—but I shall never marry."

Mr. Ford's face fell.

"Uncle," said Mab, trying to look cheerful, "I am going to Shane's Country, will you come with me?"

"Not yet, Mab," he replied in a tone she could not misunderstand, "but I shall go some day. There's room by Lavinia's side."

He walked away, and Mab sighed.

Old times were with her, as she went up the lonely path that led to her aunt's last resting-place. Her very heart was stirred as she entered that quiet domain of the dead, and walked amongst the green hillocks. It was wrong—it must be wrong to be thinking of him so much, but she could not help it. Her whole heart pined for some news and token of his being. That he was far away, somewhere in France, she knew, but she knew no more; and though she did not ask to see or meet him again—that would not be right—she longed to know that he was prosperous, honoured, and, so far as his hard lot allowed it, happy. That was all she wanted, and Providence denied it.

When Mab reached her aunt's grave, she was at once conscious of a change around it. Something had been disturbed or removed. She looked, and perceived that Mr. O'Lally's family vault must have been opened and entered recently. She approached the large square stone that covered it, and a freshly carved inscription met her view. It ran thus:

R. I. P.

EMILY AND ELLEN FORD.

Born April the 15th, 18—.

Died May the 1st, 18—.

"They were lovely in their lives, and in their deaths were not divided."

So they were dead. One day had given them birth, one day had seen them die, one grave had received them. And who had laid them in that grave? Ah! she could not doubt it. The brother whom they had so fondly worshipped, and who, in the darkness of their last days had so faithfully remained by them, making himself their keeper and their consoler, would not have left so sacred a care to the hands of strangers. He had brought them back from their home in a country more favoured by heaven, but not more tenderly loved than theirs, to the graves of their kindred, to sleep their last sleep in Irish earth. Mab's tears fell like rain on that cold stone which covered the gentle and the good. They had not loved her, but she did not remember that then; she forgot that, in the blindness of their affection, they had hastened the ill-fated marriage of their brother. She only remembered that they had been true to him and infinitely dear; she remembered, too, that he had suffered as he stood by that grave and seen it close on the only two beings he

now could or must love—and remembering that, she grieved with his grief. Another thought came as she left Shane's Country. Was he still in the vicinity? She did not think so, but she longed to know, and, instead of going home, she made her way to Miss Flinn's.

Miss Flinn had never been fond of locomotion, as she said herself. She now hated it, for she had grown stout. Thus her friends had to call upon her or to give her up. Miss Flinn declined paying visits, she called it a piece of dreadful nonsense, but, absurd though it was, tolerated it when she was to be the recipient, and not the giver. Mab, though a rare visitor, was always a welcome one, and particularly cordial was the greeting she now received as she entered Miss Flinn's parlour. It was cordiality, however, in which reproach blended.

"Now, how long is it since you showed your face here?" asked Miss Flinn.

"Six weeks," was Mab's prompt reply; "and it might have been seven if I did not want you, Miss Flinn."

"That is candid. And what do you want me for?"

"The family grave of Mr. O'Lally has been opened lately," said Mab, in an unsteady voice.

Tears suddenly rose to Miss Flinn's dark eyes.

"It has, Miss O'Flaherty," she replied; "the two sisters died on the same day—Miss Emily in the morning, and Ellen at night, just before twelve. A sore blow to their brother. Poor fellow! How he did love them, poor silly women!"

"And have you seen him, Miss Flinn?"

"Yes, child, I have—for half-an-hour; for I need not tell you he did not remain in this part of the country. He looked well, but worn. He was to sail the next morning for America. He means to buy an estate, and found an Irish settlement. He is as full of energy as ever."

"Does he mean to return?"

"I suppose I may tell you," replied Miss Flinn, after a pause. "A year after Mr. O'Lally left us, and you came, he received a letter from his wife, enclosing a certificate of the birth of their child, a boy, born a few months after her flight, and informing him that, do what he might, and search as long as he would, he should never see either her or the child. He found means to ascertain that her statement was true, and she was even traced to New York; and now he has gone himself, in the hopes of finding her and the child, and he never means to return to this country. I always disliked that Annie and her sullen black eyes."

Mab did not answer. She pitied and she hated

Annie ; she pitied her for having been driven from doting affection to such implacable resentment, and she hated her for the new thorn she put into Mr. O'Lally's lot. Oh ! it was cruel to let him know the child was born, only to torment him, and it was terrible to think such love should end thus.

"Miss Flinn," she said, after a pause, "did Mr. O'Lally leave you no message for me ?"

"My dear Miss O'Flaherty, he did not utter your name. That you were in his thoughts I am certain, and surely you cannot doubt—but how could he speak of you ?"

Mab did not answer, but her clasped hands twitched nervously.

"Poor little thing," thought Miss Flinn, "I wonder he did not marry her, she was much the nicer girl of the two—and she is fond of him still."

"What ! going so soon ?" she exclaimed, as Mab rose.

Mab smiled drearily.

"I came for news," she said, "and you had none to give me. You may look at me, Miss Flinn, I have no pride—none, but I can bear my fate, so do not pity me."

"And when will you come to see me, then ?"

"To-morrow."

Mab kept her word. She came the next day,

and she was calm, serene, and cheerful. Grief had gone back to the depths of her heart, and was once more buried there.

And still time passed, and Mab's quiet life daily grew more calm. She was not happy, but she had ceased to suffer. She was resigned to her lot, such as it was, and thankful for its many blessings. Sometimes, indeed, life felt cold and dull, and there was a great void in her heart—that void so hard to fill in youth, especially when youth has known love and passion, and lost both; but she took interest in many things. Her mind, matured in solitude, gave her, in the quiet pursuit of study, pleasures of which her eager youth had only tasted, and there were moments when she was surprised to feel how very sweet life could still be. She did not forget Mr. O'Lally—she thought of him daily, constantly, but without bitterness, and with ever decreasing regret. Hope was dead, and there is a portion of love that cannot survive hope—that purer part, in which no thought of self mingle, was still living and strong in Mab's heart.

But these were feelings Mr. Ford could not understand. Mab was not what she had been, and she would never marry—she had said so. He brooded over her sorrows with the morbid

intensity which years of suffering and remorse had bred in him. He exaggerated not their reality, but their force, for he forgot that Mab was young, and that youth cannot always suffer. Mab had happy moments, of which he knew nothing. She had walks on the mountain side, and solitary rides in the valleys, that filled her heart with peace and sweetness. She had cares, too, in the little world around her, that softened the bitterness of her own troubles. She had Nature, earth and sky, and the wild sea and her shores for her comforters. Sometimes, when she came in blooming and almost cheerful, and met him with a smile, Mr. Ford's face brightened. He looked at her as a faithful dog watches its master, and he loved her with something of a canine affection, and for a moment he felt glad; but oftener, when Mab was grave and thoughtful, as she generally was now, Mr. Ford's face fell, for he remembered her gay as a lark, and happy as the day was long. The hopeless change was too much for a mind and conscience long diseased by the severest struggles. Mab had been the darling of his heart; to see her righted, rich, and happy, had been the aim of his life, and now he knew it, on her own confession, she would never be happy, and it was all through him.

His mind, which had never been strong, and which a prevailing thought had weakened, daily grew more feeble. At length he ceased to think, he only felt; the long flickering flame of life which Frederick Norton's visit had kindled anew, all but expired in its socket. His prophecy that he should not live long was thus fulfilled. He lived indeed, but almost as one dead. To look at Mab, to wander about the house, to hold in his hand a newspaper which he never read, and, when the day was fine, to sit in the sun, was now the daily life of John Ford. He seldom spoke, and in all, save his bodily presence, Mab was indeed alone.

Doctor Flinn, when consulted by Mab, assured her that Mr. Ford's state was the result of loss of strength, and that he would rally yet; but he could not remove her uneasiness, and one morning that Mr. Ford looked particularly ill and feeble, she sent for Doctor Flinn in great haste. He came sooner than she expected him. Had she reflected, she must have known that her messenger had not reached him, but she did not think of that, and at once explained the cause of her uneasiness.

"I saw Mr. Ford as I came in," replied Doctor Flinn, "and I thought he looked well enough—he is not a strong man, Miss O'Flaherty."

"I wish I could give him some of my superfluous strength," sighed Mab, "I have no use for it."

"Yes, you seem in very good health indeed, Miss O'Flaherty; and allow me to tell you that you have got back all your good looks since you came to Ireland. How long have you been with us?"

"Four years—I am twenty-five now—quite old."

"Oh! quite," replied Doctor Flinn; "Miss O'Flaherty, it is a shame that you will not marry—Miss Flinn always says so."

"Tell Miss Flinn not to provoke me, else I shall marry you, Doctor Flinn."

"I wish you would," he replied, with great alacrity.

Mab laughed. She looked well, merry, and handsome. Doctor Flinn looked at her keenly. "It is all over," he thought, "and it is time it should be too," he added. And as he had something to tell Mab, something she should know, and which it was very hard to relate, he slowly rubbed his nose, and began rather wide the mark.

"By the way, why do you not travel, Miss O'Flaherty?"

"I do not care about it, Doctor Flinn."

"Well, I do not know but you are right; tra-

velling is awkward for ladies; even men do not always manage it well. Did you ever hear from Mr. O'Lally?"

"Never," answered Mab, "I should like to know how he is getting on with his settlement in America."

Doctor Flinn rubbed his nose again. She spoke very quietly, without the old emotion, without a blush or a sigh. He could tell her.

"I have heard about him," he said, "and—they were not exactly good news."

"How so?" asked Mab.

"To be frank, I called on purpose to tell you—I was afraid you might read it in some stray paper and get a shock."

Mab played with her chain, and did not answer a word.

"Mr. O'Lally is dead," said Doctor Flinn, with much emotion.

Mab's hands still played with her chain, but her eyes grew fixed, her lips turned white, and her cheeks were covered with a livid pallor. Doctor Flinn rose alarmed, and wanted to ring the bell.

"Do not," she said, in a low voice, "it is over now. Doctor Flinn," she added, looking at him with a smile, "he is not dead—but do not give me such a shock again, you would kill me."

"My poor child," said Doctor Flinn, "I wish I

had known as much as I know now ere I had told you."

"He is not dead," persisted Mab.

Doctor Flinn felt too much pity for her despair to argue with her; but his silence said much—too much. Ay, all was over: the struggle to forget, the resignation, the calm endurance were over—he was dead!

CHAPTER VIII.

SEVERAL weeks passed before Mab could ask Doctor Flinn to tell her all he knew. It was little enough. Mr. O'Lally had scarcely reached America when he had been seized with a fever, which proved fatal. Doctor Flinn had received the news in a letter which he showed Mab. She read and returned it without a word; but he saw that the battle she had nearly won was lost once more. Mr. O'Lally was no longer the man whom conscience and pride alike bade her forget; he slept in a remote grave, forgotten and uncared for by the generation around him; there was no one to dispute her claim to him now—he was hers.

A stranger would have seen no more than gravity in Mab's face, but Mr. Ford read its meaning.

"Oh! Mab, will nothing ever please you again?" he plaintively asked one day.

There are moments when the truth, even though bitter and best unspoken, will escape from our lips. Mab could not be silent then.

"Never!" she exclaimed; "never, uncle, it is all over! I can live, I must live, but all pleasure, all joy is dead in my heart."

"You cannot tell," meekly rejoined Mr. Ford; "I felt that too when Alicia died—it was a long sorrow, and yet I outlived it—and my other troubles had nothing to do with that one—and yet it was a great one. Oh! Mab, I thought I should go mad the night Alicia died. You see it was such a blow—but I forget you don't know it—it is too long to tell, besides I am not sure I could—but oh! Mab, she was my wife, and your trouble is not what mine was. And I wish, I do," he pettishly added, with his old wrongheadedness, "I wish you would try and forget that Mr. O'Lally—who, after all, married another."

"He married another, but he loved me," said Mab, with a rising colour; "and, uncle, it is useless to argue with a grief like mine—I can never be happy again—never, for I must live without him." And her lips quivered as she uttered the passionate declaration.

"Shall we go to Miss Flinn's?" asked Mr. Ford, quite subdued.

"As you please."

They went, but the road that led to Miss Flinn's never brought cheerful thoughts to Mab, and her face was rather sadder than usual when they entered Miss Flinn's parlour.

They found Miss Flinn in a great rage, and not without cause. She had just received a letter, and what a letter! There never had been anything like it.

"Read it, Miss O'Flaherty," she said, putting it into Mab's hand; "read it, and tell me if it is not just like her."

Mab took the letter, and looked at it—it bore a foreign post-mark, and ran thus:—

"**M**Y DEAR MISS FLINN,—When you receive this I shall be no more. You might refuse the living, you will not refuse the dead a last request. For the sake of old times, have mercy on me—take my child! God's hand has been heavy upon me. I am dying, and I am all but destitute—my friends in Ireland are estranged, and I would rather leave my darling to the kindness of strangers than to theirs. I leave him to yours, and to

Doctor Flinn's. The cure of the little village where I have been hiding for the last three years will tell you where to find him. For God's sake, take my child! Of course I only mean for a time. His father will be but too glad to have him now. Do it, Miss Flinn, as you wish to find mercy some day.

"ANNIE GARDINER."

The letter dropped from Mab's hands.

"I never heard anything like it!" cried Miss Flinn, looking from Mab to Mr. Ford, and from him to Mab again; "there is that Mrs. O'Lally leaving her child to *me*, who hated her."

Mab took up the letter and read it over in silence.

"She did not know her husband was dead," she said, returning it to Miss Flinn.

"And what have I to do with their child?" cried Miss Flinn, looking exasperated. "Miss Gardiner did not dote upon me, I can tell you, and I do believe she singled me out of spite. As to her 'of course I only mean for a time,' it is all nonsense. Her husband is dead, and her own friends have left the country, as she knew quite well, I'll be bound. But Annie was always sly. Well, here's news

for Doctor Flinn, who always comes in and says, What news, Bridget? A pretty long face he will pull when I tell him this."

"Uncle," said Mab, rising and looking at the sky, "I see a storm coming on."

"Very well, my dear, we shall go."

They bade Miss Flinn a hurried adieu, and left her, still amazed and very indignant at their sudden departure. Of course she knew what it meant—they wanted to keep out of it.

As soon as they were out of sight of Miss Flinn's windows, Mab stopped short, like one out of breath.

"Uncle," she began.

"I know," he interrupted, "you want the child."

"Uncle," she exclaimed, clasping her hands, and speaking with sudden energy, "I think that if I had that child I could be happy again."

"You shall have him," cried Mr. Ford. "I will go back and ask the direction from Miss Flinn, and start at once. You shall have him, Mab, if I have life and strength to get him for you."

He was going off, but Mab detained him.

"Uncle, I know the direction," she said;

"it is Varnes, near Dieppe, and I saw, too, on the corner of the other page what Miss Flinn had not seen, that Mrs. O'Lally called herself Mrs. Brown—that will guide us."

"Are you coming with me, Mab?"

"Yes, uncle; I would not let you travel alone, in the first place, and, in the second, I could not stay behind. Oh, that we might leave to-night!"

"I am ready to go," eagerly said Mr. Ford.

"No, uncle, you shall not travel at night, but we shall both leave to-morrow morning; for suppose anyone else should get the child—I do not mean Miss Flinn—but any one else."

"It is not likely anyone would have him, Mab."

"Oh! uncle, who knows? There are plenty of rich childless people who would be glad of such a child."

"I suppose so."

"You see, uncle, said Mab, stopping short again, "that child will be a new life to me. I could scarcely keep in whilst Miss Flinn was talking so strangely, and I left because the first thing is to get the child—after that I can say what I please. Uncle, I was mad

when I told you I should never be happy again—I am afraid I shall be too happy—if I can only have him."

"There is no fear about that, Mab."

"Ah, uncle, you cannot tell—happiness has always fled before me—what if this should melt away before I can seize it?"

Mr. Ford looked at her wistfully; for many a long day he had not seen Mab so. When they came within view of O'Lally's Town, she looked at her house with a kindling eye.

"I am glad it is mine now," she said, pressing Mr. Ford's arm to her side, and looking round in his face with tears in her eyes and a bright smile on her lips, "I am glad I have money and land, for if it often made my heart ache to think I took them from Mr. O'Lally, it will be a great joy to give them back to Mr. O'Lally's child some day."

"Mab, you will spoil him."

"No, uncle, but I shall love him dearly. He shall have a pony—he must be manly. And Father Macarthy, the Benedictine monk, shall teach him, for his father was learned, and so must he be."

Mr. Ford heard her, and shook his head, but Mab went on with undiminished ardour, and the whole day and the whole evening she could

speak of nothing else. But when the morning came Mab was in a high fever, and Doctor Flinn declared there was but one cure for her: to get her the child.

"And must I leave Mab so?" plaintively said Mr. Ford.

"My sister shall come and take care of her."

Mr. Ford sighed, but it was for Mab's good—he must yield. However, and with his old secretiveness, he chose to leave the house by stealth, and it was only when he had been gone some hours that Mab, to her despair, learned his departure. Doctor Flinn, who witnessed the outburst of her grief, prudently concealed his share in the transaction, and left to Miss Flinn, who had taken up her domicile at O'Lally's Town, the task of administering consolation.

"Oh! Miss Flinn, you do not know uncle," replied Mab; "it is a long journey, and he will stay some time away and not write—he never does; and knowing him to be weak both in body and in mind, how shall I bear his cruel silence?"

She had to bear it, however, for, as she had foreseen, Mr. Ford did not write. A week passed, then ten days, and still no tidings came of him.

Mab's excitement now gave way to a deep and silent apathy, which made Doctor Flinn regret more than ever the advice he had given Mr. Ford. He was doing his best to cheer her one evening, the twelfth that followed Mr. Ford's departure, and Miss Flinn was seconding him, when Mab, who sat by the fireside listening to them with closed eyes, suddenly looked up with a start. She had heard carriage wheels, but they had not.

"Take my word for it, Miss O'Flaherty," said Doctor Flinn, "Mr. Ford will drop in upon you when you least expect it. I only hope the surprise and joy will not be too much for you."

The carriage wheels were drawing nearer, Mab heard them distinctly.

"But I do hope, Miss O'Flaherty," said Miss Flinn, "that if you feel hysterical you will check the tendency. Hysterics are most dangerous—"

"Miss Flinn!"

"It is no use looking daggers at me, Doctor Flinn. You know well enough that, once a woman has had hysterics, she has them her whole life long. And, therefore, check the tendency, I say."

Mab shaded her eyes with her hand. The carriage had stopped; he had come home safe,

but had he brought the child? Doctor Flinn and his sister were silent; they too had heard it, and they saw there was no need to prepare Mab. Though she did not stir, though she did not remove her hand from her eyes, her whole attitude bespoke expectation deep and breathless.

The door opened, but Mab did not look. She heard Mr. Ford's step on the carpet, but it was only when his voice said "Mab," that she removed her hand. He stood on the hearth before her smiling, and in his arms a boy of three lay fast asleep.

The scene Doctor Flinn had feared did not take place. Mab did not indulge in the hysterics against which Miss Flinn had warned her. Deep peace seemed to enter her troubled heart—peace so deep, that joy had scarcely room left.

"Uncle, dear uncle," she softly said as she rose and kissed his cheek, "how could you leave me?"

"Here he is, Mab," replied Mr. Ford, handing her the boy, who was wakening slowly, opening wide his deep blue eyes, Mr. O'Lally's eyes, and looking around him with grave wonder; "here he is, take him and love him—take him and love him," repeated Mr. Ford, whose heart was rather full, and needed the repetition of the homely phrase.

Mab took the boy and set him on her knee. He had his father's eyes and his father's finely-cut features, softened by the grace of infancy.

"What is your name, darling?" she whispered softly.

"Johnny," was his prompt reply.

"John O'Lally, say."

"No—Johnny."

"There was not much trouble in getting him," said Mr. Ford, sitting down. "Poor Mrs. O'Lally was dead and buried—I saw her grave. She left nothing—no papers, the curé said, only a little money. I told him to give it to the poor. But I brought the child's clothes."

Mab looked at him sadly. He spoke in his old dreamy way, the energy, the will her strong desire had wakened in him were gone—to return no more. Here Miss Flinn rose, and beckoning to Doctor Flinn, who obeyed the signal, she quietly left the room. Mab remained alone with the boy and Mr. Ford. He watched her wistfully. She looked at the print above the fireplace, then at Johnny, who seemed still lost in serious astonishment; then drawing him closer to her, she embraced him fondly, whilst tears—not all of sorrow—fell on his brown curls. Mr. Ford was sit-

ting opposite her with his hands on his knees. Mab smiled at him: a bright, almost a happy smile.

"Yes, uncle," she said, answering his look, "that is it; I could not have the father, but I have got the child."

●

CHAPTER IX.

THE springs of life are very strong when the twenties are not over yet, and the calm sober region of the thirties is still closed and unentered ground. There are but few tokens of sorrow upon Mab now. These signs may come later, the impatient and restless look, the absent smile, the weariness of all things which speak of a life disappointed and of broken aims—all these may start up into sudden life, even as the autumn weeds, the after-growth of the garden, appear there when the sweet spring and summer flowers are gone. But Mab's first summer days are still in their prime. What though the spring-time was sad and clouded, what though one great hope was wrecked for ever, the sea of life

has many shores, and some of these are very pleasant, even though they are so far away from the rosy islands of love.

It was very sweet to have Johnny all her own, to teach him his letters, to play with him, to run with him along the garden paths, or sit with him for half a day at a time on the grass. Sometimes Mab and the boy walked together hand-in-hand by the sea-shore. She picked up shells for him, and helped him to gather sea-weed ; she watched him splashing barefoot in the edge of foam, hunting the crab, the star-fish, or the sea anemone, and in her heart, and not without some sadness, she wondered at the fate which brought her there with Mr. O'Lally's child. Though her vigilant looks never left him, Mab's thoughts were not always with Johnny. She remembered other days than these, when the green waves beat against the long brown shore, and a lost voice spoke in language it was very sweet to hear. Then for a while the old fever would waken, for Mab was still young, and youth thirsts for happiness. Oh ! how greedily, if it but had its way, it would drink its fill of the sweet draught, and drain the cup, and leave not a drop behind for after-years. But Providence is wise in its severity. If those eager desires could be sated

thus early, the rest of life would seem too flat and dull. It is right, therefore, that our covetous hearts should be stinted. Thus we learn to fight the battle of life, and reach the great goal, and win the last victory.

It was the sweetness and the charm of this new love of Mab's, that at once, and as if by magic, it had softened all bitterness out of the past. No sooner was Johnny in her possession, than Mab went herself and opened Mrs. O'Lally's room. With her own hand she carefully put away all that had belonged to the dead lady. Was she not Johnny's mother, and might he not some day value these memorials of her? Her next act was to cause a plain but substantial slab of marble to be placed over Annie Gardiner's last resting-place.

"My Johnny's mother shall not sleep in a forgotten grave," she said, fondly pressing him to her heart.

She forgave the dead Mrs. O'Lally, and, what was harder, she forgave the living Robert. He was a widower now, with one child, a girl, named Alicia, said to be like Mr. Ford's dead wife, and they were both in England, and Mab read in Mr. Ford's wistful eyes that he longed to see his son and his son's child. She could not deny his saddened age that solace.

She wrote a kind forgiving letter of invitation; and when Robert's answer of acceptance came, she put it into Mr. Ford's hand. His cheek flushed, his dull eye brightened, but he could not speak.

"Uncle," said Mab, "I shall be jealous of Robert."

"Don't," he entreated; "you know I always loved that boy. He was so handsome, so clever, and so good. I was proud of him, and what father would not have been? But he never cared much about me. I deserved it—only it was hard."

"Deserved it!" indignantly cried Mab. "Oh! uncle, do not make me say harsh things of your son."

"No, do not, Mab," beseechingly said Mr. Ford; "I could not bear it. Robert was his mother's darling, and his faults, I have no doubt, sprang from the bad rearing I gave him."

Mab would not argue. It was Mr. Ford's destiny to blame himself, and to suffer to the last.

More than she would have liked to say did it cost Mab to see Robert again, but when she saw Mr. Ford leading a fair-haired, blue-eyed child by the hand, and looking with loving

eyes at his eldest and still eminently handsome son, she neither could nor would repent.

The meeting between her and Robert was friendly and calm. She went out to him with Johnny clinging to her, and she welcomed him as freely as if bitterness had never risen between them. Of the two Robert seemed the more affected. Mab was struck with his sunken eyes, and wearied, unhappy look. Heart-ache had been busy with him, she saw.

"Robert, are you really well?" she asked.

He did not answer. He was looking at Johnny.

"It is Mr. O'Lally's child," said Mab.

"I understand," replied Robert, sharply.

"Yes," said Mab, proudly, "I might have been his wife, but for you."

Her eyes flashed, her lips quivered, as she recalled her cruel wrong. But she soon calmed down, and, holding out her hand, said, in a friendly voice:

"Forgive me, Robert, I have grown hasty, as you see. But I cannot always bear to think of the past. I have not been happy, nor, in many respects, have you?"

"Happy!" and for the first time his lips quivered, and the working of his features betrayed genuine emotion. "My wife never for-

gave me the affection I once bore you, and my brothers the wrong you had endured from me. I believe my father once resented the influence I possessed over them ; he need not do so now. Of him they speak with affection and respect, of me—but no matter. I have not seen them these two years, and if I have left Australia, it is that they made the country too bitter for me."

"Ah ! they should never have forgotten what they owed you," cried Mab, moved, as she remembered the past.

Robert seemed unable to pursue the subject, and it was not renewed whilst he remained at O'Lally's Town.

He left rather suddenly one morning, but Alicia remained behind. Mab could not resist Mr. Ford's pleading eyes ; he was the child now, and it was her part to guard and indulge him. Robert, on being asked, seemed glad to leave Alicia in Mab's care, and to comply with her wishes.

As suddenly as he had left did Robert return, and Mr. Ford, convinced he had come to take away the child that had already wound itself around his heart-strings, piteously appealed to Mab.

"Mab," he said, "keep Alicia, I have not long to live—keep Alicia for me."

"I will if I can, uncle."

"Of course you can, but you are so wrapt up in Johnny that you do not think of Alicia, or of me now, and you do not know how dear a child she is."

He spoke quite querulously. Mab's heart smote her. Ay, she was making an idol of Mr. O'Lally's child, and old affections were cast into the shade by that new love. Ah! she could not help it, he was both himself and his father too; but yet it was wrong, and she would shew it so plainly no more. Her cheeks burned as Mr. Ford taxed her thus plainly with a preference she could not well deny; but she tried to laugh, and told him he should see how she would plead and keep Alicia for him.

She lost no time in taking out Robert into the garden, and in preferring her request.

"Dear Robert," said she, putting her hand on his arm, and looking kindly in his face, "I cannot part with your child. See, how well she looks now! You must leave her to me for the sake of old times—leave her, at least, a little longer, Robert."

Robert looked very much embarrassed.

"You must not say me nay," persisted Mab. "You must not, indeed. I must have Alicia for another while."

"Indeed—" began Robert.

"No objections," said Mab, putting her hand on his lips, and trying to laugh; "you owe me that, Robert—ask your conscience if you do not."

"Alicia shall stay if you wish it," said Robert, taking her hand, and pressing it to his lips before he released it, "but will you always wish for it, Mab?"

He looked and spoke rather sadly.

"Why not?" she asked.

Robert did not reply at once. They were walking down the garden path: with his cane he idly struck the boughs of the shrubs near him.

"Now, Mr. Ford," said Mab, arresting his hand, "please not to play King Tarquin with my flowers."

Robert ceased, and, stopping short, he said:

"You do not ask what took me to London."

"Business?"

"Yes, Mab, business. I went to know whether I am to live or die, and I have had my answer. Poor little Queen Mab, how shocked you look! I should not have told you so abruptly. But it is so. And, Mab," he added, "you will let me die near my poor father and you, for the sake of old times, and

you will keep Alicia—as long as you like, Mab."

Still Mab was silent. She heard him—she even believed him, but she could not realize that Robert was doomed, that his life, though so short, had already reached its utmost limit. It was a bright clear day; the blue sky, the warm sun, the green earth, the gay shouts of the children at the other end of the garden, spoke of life, ever full, ever young. How could Robert die?

"Robert!" she cried at length, "it is impossible."

They had reached the pond, and Robert, taking some crumbs from his pocket, began feeding the swans.

"Mab," he suddenly said, "Mab, do you remember our villa on the Thames?"

Mab looked at him, unable to speak.

"There were to be roses in it, roses which you were to tend, and swans which you were to feed."

Still Mab could not say one word. The past he recalled rushed back to her with so much force that she felt like one choking for want of breath. Robert looked at her tenderly and pityingly.

"Poor little Mab," he said softly stroking

her hand, and drawing her arm within his, “poor little Queen Mab, I should not have spoken of that. I did not think you still cared so much for me.”

“Robert, dear Robert,” she cried, throwing her arms around his neck, “you shall not leave us. We will not part with you. You are mistaken—you are not so ill. God will not inflict on us that last bitter grief.”

Her words were broken by sobs. Robert sighed. Very drearily he looked back over the vanished years.

“Poor Mab, poor little Queen Mab!” he said again, and his hand smoothed the golden hair of the head that now lay on his shoulder, “what a dreadful mistake the past has been! And yet—you would never have been happy with me, Mab; it was like the villa on the Thames, and the roses and the swans—a thing to dream of, and never to come to pass.”

“But you are not so ill,” persisted Mab.

“Well, perhaps I am not,” replied Robert, cheerfully; “I made the doctors tell me the worst, for I have much heavy business to settle—but perhaps I am not so ill.”

“I am sure you are not!” cried Mab.

“Granted. And now, Mab, suppose you guess what brought me home so suddenly to-day.”

His tone was strange.

Mab felt startled. She tried to read his face, but it told her nothing.

"Well," she said, "what was it?"

"No selfish purpose. I came here for you, Mab, on an errand you little suspect."

Mab turned pale as death. His looks, his words flashed a sudden conviction through her heart.

"Mr. O'Lally is living!" she cried.

"Who told you so?" exclaimed Robert amazed.

"I knew it!" cried Mab, in an unutterable transport; "I never believed in my heart he was dead—never! Oh! Robert, where is he?"

"In America, I believe."

"If he were at the end of the earth, he loves me still. Oh! what have I done that God should be so very good to me?"

The wildness of her joy alarmed Robert. He tried in vain to calm her. Mab did not heed him. She walked up and down the garden with clasped hands, uttering breathless ejaculations. At lengthshe ceased—she sat down on a garden chair—she buried her face in her hands, and long remained thus. When she looked up, her cheeks were covered with tears.

"God knows best," she said, "I thought him

dead, and it was for a wise purpose; I learn he is living, and I am glad. If he were estranged for ever from me by other affections and other ties, I will still be glad. You shall tell me all later, now I could not bear it. I only will rejoice that my darling has got back his father."

Robert looked at her rather wistfully. He measured the depths of that unselfish love which no woman had ever felt for him.

"You do not ask how the fact of Mr. O'Lally's life came to my knowledge," said Robert.

"Robert, you say it, and I feel it is true—you would not deceive me."

"No—but do not expect him just yet, Mab. He is far away, and the last news of him are a year old. A Mr. Sims, with whom I have business in London, mentioned him to me, and even entrusted me with this."

He handed her a letter as he spoke. Mab recognised Mr. O'Lally's handwriting, for, though he had never written to her, she had often seen it, and it was a peculiar hand, bold and clear. The letter was a mere formal and business acknowledgment of another letter received, but it was signed in full, "JOHN O'LALLY." Ay, he was living a year back at least, and that first report of his death was a cruel and bitter error. Mab laid her two hands on Ro-

bert's shoulder, and, looking in his face with glistening eyes and quivering lips, said,

"Oh! Robert, dear old Robert, I must love you again like the Robert of old times. And you shall live, Robert, I am sure of it. We have both suffered for our sin; for I, alas! would have been faithless to you, but for Aunt Lavinia. For his sake I would have done what you did for William and Edward. I loved him beyond my own truth and honour, and therefore was the hand of God so heavy upon me. But Heaven is very merciful: you see he is alive. And I have written to your brothers, and my heart tells me they will come back to you humbled and penitent."

"They will come back when all is over," thought Robert, but he would not sadden her, and he asked what she would do.

"I shall write to him to-night," she answered.

"He may have left the place whence that letter is dated. Mr. Sims says he is never stationary."

"Then I shall not merely write, but advertise."

She spoke without doubt or fear. Neither could mar her pure joy. She was sure he loved her. What matter that years had passed

since their parting? Happiness is measured, not by its duration, but by its depth and sincerity. They would put all theirs in what yet remained of life and youth.

"Aunty!" cried Johnny's joyous voice from the end of the garden.

Mab turned round her bright face.

"Ah! he must know his father is living," she exclaimed; and leaving Robert's side, she hastily went to meet her darling. Robert watched them from afar. Mab was seated on a bench, and Johnny was on her knee; she was telling him the wonderful story, to which he listened with open mouth and eyes. The narrative ended in a long caress, and this in tears. Robert drew near them, and he heard Mab say soothingly: "Hush, my darling, your father is coming back—you must be glad, you must not cry. He must find you brave and strong, and be almost as proud of you as you always will be proud of him."

Robert walked away pensively. Ay, this was the true love, the true worship which neither absence nor time could destroy. He met his father, who, holding Alicia by the hand, had been hovering uneasily about.

"You will not take her away, Robert, will you?" he asked, pleadingly.

"I did not come here for that," replied his son; and he briefly told him his errand.

Mr. Ford at first remained mute, then he wondered if it could be true, and when convinced on this head, he said thoughtfully:

"Mab will be very happy now. I never knew a love such as is hers for that Mr. O'Lally."

"Yes," replied Robert, with a sigh, "that is the love which one woman in ten thousand feels, and which all profess to feel."

CHAPTER X.

EVERY great joy has its wakening. Mab's wakening came six months after Robert had brought her the happy tidings. Her letters—for she wrote more than once—her advertisements, had remained unanswered. She long resisted the conviction that Mr. O'Lally was as much lost to her as if the dark stream of death had flowed between them. She long indulged herself with day-dreams and endless conversations with Johnny, her only confidant on this subject; but there came a day when hope acknowledged herself vanquished, when the joyful light left Mab's eye, and she became the Mab of the old sad days before Johnny had come.

But she was not long indulged with a purely

selfish grief. Slow was the fulfilment of Robert's prophecy, but the London doctors had not deceived him; though slow, it was sure. Mr. Ford saw and suspected nothing. "Robert had never been strong," he said, and Mab shrank from the task of enlightening him. She could not inflict that cruel blow on the old man. He was fortunately too much wrapped up in Alicia to notice anything. She was seldom off his knee, rarely away from his side. He appeared to feel for her a sort of childish love, and she for him a grave, tender, and most unchildish affection.

They were all thus one afternoon—Alicia on Mr. Ford's knee, Robert reclining in his chair with closed eyes, Mab sitting by him sewing, and listening to Johnny's shouts of joy in the garden, when the long silence, for no one spoke, was suddenly broken by Robert.

"Mab," he said, "is it not strange that you have never heard from Mr. O'Lally?"

"We must wait, and trust to Providence," replied Mab.

Robert looked at her and sighed. No one could mistake the sad meaning of Mab's face. Ay, Mr. O'Lally was living, and he would return some day, but he would come when the last bloom of youth had fled. He would come when hope,

weary of waiting so long, would be cold and dead, and then he would take away the joy of her life; he would claim the child, and Mab would remain alone and forsaken.

"Poor Mab!" sighed Robert, "poor little Queen Mab, what an ending!"

There are moments when it is very hard to be pitied, when it is more than we can endure. Mab could bear her burden in silence, but some things she could not hear spoken. She threw her work down, and, rising, abruptly left the room.

"What ails Mab?" asked Mr. Ford, who seemed to waken up.

"Nothing—but there are no news of Mr. O'Lally."

"Mr. O'Lally! then he is not dead! Ah! no, I remember. And she wants news of him."

"Poor Mab!" sighed Robert, "it were better I had never told her he was living."

"Yes, why did you tell her?" rather querulously exclaimed his father. "She was well and happy until you came and told her."

Alicia seemed frightened at the sharp tone of his voice, and softly laid her cheek to his; he kissed her, and spoke no more. Soon after this he left the room. When Mab entered it

Robert was alone, and he was sleeping in his chair. How grey and worn looked his poor face in the twilight—the handsome face on which Aunt Lavinia's eyes had so often dwelt with fondness and pride. And it would soon be over; the end was coming on. As assuredly as morning yields to noon, and noon to night, so would his little span of life close in the calm evening of death. Ah! if the death which is unforeseen is terrible in its suddenness, how terrible too is that of which we can almost tell the day and the hour! Death, the fate of all, comes to some as the thief in the night; it is then the stealthy assassin who bides his hour. But to others it is as the inexorable judgment of the law to the condemned—the execution without reprieve or hope.

Whilst Mab was thus gazing on him, Robert awoke suddenly.

“Where is my father?” he asked eagerly.

“I saw him in the garden. How do you feel, Robert?”

“As usual, thank you. Did he take Alicia with him?”

“No, she is here.”

“I wish he had taken the child,” uneasily said Robert.

Mab wished it too when she found that Mr.

Ford did not return. He did not come back that day nor the next. He was traced as far as the railway; there all signs of him were lost; and weeks passed and brought no news. Both Mab and Robert felt convinced that he had gone to seek for Mr. O'Lally, a wild, vain search, that made Mab's heart ache doubly. If she had been more calm and more patient, Mr. Ford would never have left home. These thoughts oppressed her one evening as she sat with Robert. She felt very sad as she looked at his pale face resting on the white pillow in his chair. A few days more, and that face would be at rest in a cold dark bed; above it the heavy earth would lie, and pitiless wind and rain would sweep unheard and unfelt. Mab's heart felt sinking. She had borne much in her short life; death, partings worse than death, abandonment, treachery, solitude, and now she was called upon to bear more. Robert was dying, and his father was away, uncared for in his weak old age. She longed for Mr. Ford's return, and she dreaded it. Yet it would be very hard if he came back unprepared, and found his son's chair vacant for ever.

With the secret sympathy which exists between persons who live much and closely together, Robert who had sat silent for a long time,

now roused himself and said suddenly, "I wish my father would write."

"He never used to write when he was away," replied Mab. She stopped suddenly, and started to her feet. She had heard Mr. Ford's voice in the hall, and before she could reach the door, it opened, and he entered.

"Oh! uncle, dear uncle!" she cried, clasping him in her arms, and forgetting everything in the joy of his return.

Mr. Ford embraced her with a sigh, and gently putting her away, he sat down in the chair she had left vacant. The firelight played on his face, and Mab was struck with his worn and wearied look. He sat, his hands on his knees, his eyes fixed on Robert. But it was to Mab he spoke.

"Mab," he said, in a childish, pitiful accent, "I tried very hard, but I could not find him."

"How is Alicia?" were Mr. Ford's next words; but he still looked at Robert with an anxious glance.

"Alicia is well, uncle. What will you take?—are you not tired?"

He made a gesture of impatient denial.

"I have heard from your brothers," he said, addressing his son; "they are in England, in the north, and they will come and see you in

a few days. They will come by the *Mermaid*, they said."

Robert's face lit, then fell again.

"Poor fellows!" he said; "I shall be gone then, and it will only grieve them."

"Gone!" repeated Mr. Ford. "What is he saying, Mab?"

"Do not mind him, uncle, Robert is low."

"Mab, where is the use of deceiving my father any longer? I am dying, and I know it. It is time he should know it too."

Mr. Ford rose to his feet, rigid and pale.

"Dying!" he said, "dying, Robert!"

"Yes, and it is time I should go before poor Mab is quite worn out. But I am sorry you came back so soon. It is a useless grief."

Mr. Ford stared at him, then at Mab, then sank down on his chair without a word. He remembered his wife's death-bed, and mechanically he repeated her moaning cry: "The sins of guilty parents are visited on their innocent children—it is Bible truth, it is Gospel truth!"

"Uncle, dear uncle, do not say that!" exclaimed Mab, who understood his meaning but too well.

Mr. Ford sighed and shook his head.

"The end is coming," he said, drearily; "the end of all, Mab."

She stooped and kissed him. His tears were flowing slowly along his withered cheeks. There was no violent grief, no burst of passionate sorrow; but there was, and Mab knew it, the sense of a deep humiliation, of a just though chastening hand.

"How the wind is rising!" said Robert.

It was rising indeed, and very drearily it came from the north-west, blending with the surge of the Atlantic.

"God help those at sea!" continued Robert, with a sigh; "their death must be very bitter. Mab, I think I shall go to my room."

They helped him up-stairs. They laid him in the bed which had been Miss Lavinia's, and Robert left it no more.

The end came on the third evening after that of Mr. Ford's return. Mab sat by him, remembering Miss Lavinia's pale face as she lay in that large square bed. The same heavy curtains hung around it still. They looked a hundred years old at least, and might be so. Beneath these massive damask folds had already flourished, faded, and died three generations; they had witnessed Miss Lavinia's agony, and were now to behold that of her darling. He lay with closed eyes. Mab sat near him, looking at him, and listening to the wind. It

howled dismally round the old house—for the last three days it had not ceased its sullen moan. Robert, too, heard it, for he said, with a sigh :

“ What a night ! It would have spoiled all the roses in our villa, eh, Mab ? ”

“ Robert, dear Robert, say something else ! Do not talk of that ! ” she entreated.

“ Poor Mab ! Why will you grieve so ? It is not hard to die. I assure you it is not. When the time has come—what o’clock is it ? ”

“ Half-past seven.”

“ Well, then, before nine strikes it will all be over, and when the time has come, I shall turn to the wall, and heave a sigh or so—and that is all, Mab.”

Mab half rose to call Mr. Ford, but she sat down again. He had left the room because he could not bear the sight—why compel him to return ? Besides, who knew but Robert might live days yet ? There was a large, old-fashioned watch on the table. Its monotonous ticking fell painfully on Mab’s ear. Every second seemed struck by the hand of Death. Mab looked at it with nervous emotion. An hour passed, then it was a quarter to nine; now it wanted but ten minutes, now only five.

She looked at Robert. He was sitting up in bed. He looked at her, and seemed striving to utter words that would not pass his lips.

"Robert, what is it?" she asked.

He tried to answer, but she could not understand the incoherent sounds that passed his lips. She thought later that he had said "the sea," but she did not receive that impression then—she received none. He sank back, turned to the wall, sighed, and died as calmly as a child falls to sleep.

Mab felt wonderfully composed. She went out for his father. They met on the staircase.

"All is over!" she said to him.

And he mechanically repeated after her, "All is over!"

They entered the room together. A beautiful and holy calmness had already settled on Robert's face. His father stood and looked at those serene marble features, that recalled vividly the dead Alicia. He turned to Mab, and said in a whisper,

"He is like his mother."

Then he sat down in Mab's chair, and remained there watching the whole of that long, dreary night.

It would have been useless to argue with him, and Mab did not. Besides, there was a

steadiness and tranquillity in Mr. Ford's grief that silenced argument. He sat looking at his son, but he shed no tears, he uttered no laments. When he spoke, it was to say with a calm sigh :

"The Lord gave, and the Lord took away." Or, "God is just."

Mab sat with him. Her chair was at the foot of the bed. She could see Mr. Ford's bent figure ; his hands resting on his knees, his head half sunk on his breast, his eyes fixed on the pale face before him. And heavy though the shadow of the curtains was, Mab saw that pale face too. Wonderful and sweet was its beauty. It was scarcely like Robert. It was the immortal image of the living man ; the handsome and imperious features were now clothed with gentleness and repose. Suffering, indeed, had left its lines there, but it was the suffering we see painted in dead saints and martyrs—something holy beyond mere mortality. If lingering resentment for a great wrong endured, and a wasted youth, had remained in Mab's heart, it vanished for ever during the silent vigil of that night. Seeing him thus with God's seal on his brow, how could she remember Robert's sins ?

A few days later Mr. Ford's eldest son

was laid in Shane's Country, near his aunt Lavinia. As the coffin was lowered into the yawning grave, and the first shovelful of earth fell upon it, Mab heard Mr. Ford mutter:

“The sins of the parents—” then he broke off and looked at her drearily.

Alas! if he had known what Mab knew; if he had known that this grave, which now held his eldest son, was in reality the grave of his three children! If he had known that the missing *Mermaid* would never come to port, or be heard of more!—that she was gone for ever, with passengers and crew, another of the thousand mysteries of the ocean! But the cloud which had fallen on his intellect spared him that pang. Mab kept the dreary secret well. She followed Robert to the grave, and her sorrow was not for him. She thought of two who were drifting away in the deep sullen waves of the sea, whom the earth would never receive or be called on to surrender. Her childhood, her youth, this dead one's love and pride for them, the ingratitude which had stung his heart, the love which had survived all, were with her all the way, and nearly overpowered her, but strength was given her from above to bear without betraying what the old man was never to know.

They were sitting together on the evening of the funeral. The greyness of the day had melted into rain. Alicia, whose pretty pale face bore the traces of bitter tears, had crept up to her grandfather's knee ; Mab kept Johnny quiet, and the room was very still, when suddenly looking up, Mr. Ford said, in his natural voice :

" My dear, do you not think William and Edward will come to-night ? "

Mab's left hand was resting gently on Johnny's shoulder. The child felt her grasp tighten, and he gave her a half-frightened look, but, with a calmness that surprised herself, Mab answered,

" No, uncle, we must not expect them."

But he persisted with the obstinacy of a child.

" When do you think they will come, Mab ? "

" Uncle," she answered, still very calmly, " I leave all to God."

" You do well, Mab, you do well."

He said no more, and, sitting thus, Mab could think over her new destiny, for it seemed to have entered another phasis. Robert and his two brothers were dead, every link in her young life was rudely torn. He who had loved her once, probably no longer loved her

now, and at least was absent, cooled by years, if not estranged. What, then, was her fate? —to sit thus with a half-witted old man for her companion, to rear the children of the man and the woman who had robbed her of happiness.

A strange and sad destiny! But her own words came to her, "I leave all to God."

CHAPTER XI.

ROBERT has been dead five years. Mr. Ford, Mab, and the two children are sitting in the old room. It is a clear and frosty day without. The sun is shining on the sparkling earth, still white with snow. Within it is warm and pleasant. Mab sits by a window sewing. Time has passed over her; it has spared much, but much too it has taken away. For ever is gone the smiling bloom of youth, and that light from the spirit within which it gives to a girl's face. Mab is not a girl now, and she knows it; she is a woman, calm and thoughtful, who has suffered and gone through her sorrow bravely, and come out triumphant indeed, but, being human, not unharmed. On a stool at her feet sits Alicia, sewing too. Alicia is fair and pretty, quiet,

but not joyless; there is a steady grace about her, such as might beseem a young nun, yet there is nothing unchildish or that would misbecome her years. Farther on, near a broad table, Johnny, now tall and strong, sits studying hard, for Father Macarthy, the Benedictine monk, is coming. The book lies open before the boy, his eyes are bent on the page, his cheek rests on the palm of his hand, and his elbow on the table. His thick brown curls veil the broad square forehead, where intellect and will are already written. Now and then Mab looks at him. Now and then she compares his face to that above the mantelpiece, and watches the likeness daily growing more strong between the two. Of the four, Mr. Ford is least altered. Time, that has no longer any mind to wear in him, has spared the body. He sits, as usual, by the chimney corner, looking dreamily at the fire, with his hands resting on his knees. And at him, too, Mab looks with faithful tenderness.

Wise are they who can "leave all to God," and if Mab's heart sometimes belied the words her lips had uttered, these words none the less became a reality with time. The five years that had passed and brought no change in her life, had at least given it a great calmness, which covered all things, as smooth waters sleep over

the secret storms beneath. The very hopelessness of her lot had one blessed result—it made her forget herself, when memory and thought would only have been useless torments. She had to think now not merely of the two children left to her care, but still more of Mr. Ford. She returned to his old age the tenderness her youth had received, and he clung to her with the imploring fondness of a child. If Alicia was his darling, Mab still ruled his heart, and it may be that with all her passionate love for Johnny, that weak, half-childish old man held the first place in hers. They both had suffered keenly, and their sorrows, though not the same in circumstance, were similar in feeling. With both it had been love possessed and love lost, and the great blank which follows that heavy grief. One keen grief Mr. Ford's weakened intellect spared him. He knew that his eldest and most dearly loved son slept in the grave at Shane's Country, but he often querulously wondered why William and Edward never came, and he spoke of the lost *Mermaid* with impatient wonder. "Where could she be all this time?—he had never heard of such a steamer—where was she?" Alas! where was she? In the ghostly seas, where dead ships ever wander with dead crews. To

hear and answer such questions was at first Mab's severest trial, but time, which had taught her many things, also taught her to bear this.

As they sat thus very silent, and it was rather their habit to be so, Johnny, closing his book, a sure proof that he knew his lesson,—pride would never allow him to leave one unlearned—said suddenly:

“Aunt, do you think my father will come back before the year is out?”

Often and bitterly had Mab regretted the imprudent joy which had made her reveal to Johnny his father's existence. But she had felt so sure that he would come back in those first exulting moments! With a pertinacity she would not have expected from so young a child, Johnny had not ceased speculating on his father's return. She could not tell him that Mr. O'Lally was dead, for he might be living, and she would not strive to make his child forget him. She could only reply as she did now.

“God knows, Johnny, I do not. Your father is a great traveller,” she added; “we must submit to God's will, whatever that may be.”

For resignation now seemed to Mab the great secret of every human life, young or old.

"I wish I were old enough to travel, and go and look for him," said Johnny, with knit brows, for, though docile, the boy was not submissive. Besides, in many a secret conversation held when hope was still young and her own heart overflowed, Mab had raised to worship Johnny's longing for his father. He had, indeed, much provoked her by inquiring whether his father wore a helmet, and putting other questions of the kind, such, alas! being his youthful ideal of a hero; but the impression Mab had sought to foster had been awakened, and Mr. O'Lally ruled over the mind and heart of his unknown child, as one clothed in all that graces and dignifies manhood. With an impatient sigh, Johnny, turning to Alicia, exclaimed,

"Come and play, Licia, will you?"

Alicia looked up from her sewing to Mab, who smiled assent. The work was put by, neatly folded in the work-basket, and the two children went out hand-in-hand.

"Are they gone?" asked Mr. Ford from the fireside.

"Yes, uncle."

"Then come and sit by me. I want to talk to you."

Mab obeyed at once. She went and sat

by him—she passed her arm around his neck and caressingly laid her head on his shoulder.

“Poor little Mab,” he said, fondly, “poor little Queen Mab, you still think of Mr. O’Lally?”

“Yes, uncle, in my prayers,” was her calm reply.

“Not otherwise, Mab?”

“Uncle, it is ten years since we parted.”

“Ten years is it!—well, what about that, Mab?”

“Well, uncle,” she sadly answered, “my heart is worn out with the long waiting. Time has done what religion and pride once failed to do. Mr. O’Lally is dead to me, and as one dead I remember him.”

“You do not love him, Mab?”

“Uncle, that is, that must be all over on my side, as I am sure it is on his. I believe I was the great love of his life, as he was the only one of mine. But what of it?—we were young then! Youth is gone now.”

“Ah! Mab! are you sure you would speak so if you saw him?”

“Uncle, what would he say if he saw me? Am I the young girl he loved? I believe I was pretty then—what am I now? Oh! uncle, there are some things which are not in a man’s nature, and which no woman must expect. If

he had come back five years ago—but why talk of all this?" she added, breaking off with a calm smile, "my own conviction is that Mr. O'Lally is dead now."

Her voice shook a little, but her look remained serene. Without heeding her last words Mr. Ford said querulously,

"Mab, I tell you all would be well if Mr. O'Lally would only come back. And, if I were but strong I would go and look for him for you, Mab."

"Uncle, never say that—you frighten me."

She spoke with the alarm she felt.

"I tell you that if I were but strong I would, Mab," he persisted; "what is the use of all I have suffered and gone through, since you are not happy, after all?"

Two tears slowly trickled down his cheeks.

"I am happy!" cried Mab; "have I not got you and Johnny and Alicia, and a pleasant home of my own. What more do I want, or can I wish for?"

She spoke cheerfully, but Mr. Ford gave her a wistful look, and sighed, unconvinced. Mab spared no pains to seem very happy and cheerful that day. She talked, she laughed, she played on her harmonium, she moved about the house with the old brightness of Queen Mab,

and Mr. Ford seemed so pleased that she was thrown off her guard, and forgot her resolve of watching him closely. She left him for a while to take a short walk with the children; when she came in, Mr. Ford's chair by the fireside was vacant.

At once Mab ran up to his room. He was not there. She looked for him herself over the whole house, then in the garden, and could not find him. He was gone then. There was a last hope: perhaps he was at Doctor Flinn's. There was daylight yet; besides, the country was safe. She put on her bonnet and cloak, and left at once. As she reached the garden gate she was overtaken by Johnny.

"I shall go with you, aunt," he said in a manly tone, "you must not go alone."

"Must I not, Master Johnny? Well, you are a protector, no doubt! A real knight—and true."

"So was my father, was he not, aunt?"

"Your father—oh! Johnny, we must not talk too much of him."

And poor Mab sighed with a double misgiving. Johnny took her hand, and they walked on quickly through the silent country.

The afternoon was very calm and still, but of a deadly stillness; for winter is the death of

nature—the time when all her springs of life are locked up far from ken in her deep bosom.

The brightness of the morning was all gone; but the snow which lay hard upon the ground gave more light than belonged to the hour of the day, or to the season of the year, early December. Wild, dreary, and monotonous looked the wide landscape clad in that ghostly white. The hollows of the plain, and the clefts of the mountains alone, were of a soft dull grey; the sky was heavy and cloudless, and promised more snow for the night. Mab and the boy walked fast. She regretted having him with her. She longed to reach her goal, and find her fears groundless, and be once more by the cheerful hearth. The cold and solemn-looking scene around her had something unfriendly, that depressed her, as a presentiment of evil at hand. Once she stopped to take breath and question her own heart; but what has argument to do with feeling? Nothing could convince Mab that some new calamity was not going to break over her.

She shortened her road, by taking a long narrow lane deeply sunk between high banks of earth, and overshadowed by stately oaks. Their boughs were bare now, no birds sang hidden by green leaves, brooding over happy

nests of love ; the summer world of humming insects and blooming flowers was cold and dead ; the gnarled roots, the black branches, were tipped with snow, the very wind was still ; it was the same dreary aspect which she had left behind her in the plain, that again met her here, and saddened her.

The sound of a horse's hoofs on the road above the lane wakened Mab out of her reverie. She stood still, motioning Johnny not to speak, and, listening, she recognised the even, steady step of Doctor Flinn's pony. At once she called out his name ; he heard, and answered her with the wondering exclamation :

“Miss O'Flaherty ! What has happened ?”

“Nothing, I hope—but pray tell me this—have you seen my uncle ?”

“I have this moment met him.”

“Ah ! thank God !” cried Mab ; “but where was he going, Doctor Flinn ?”

“To O'Lally's Town, to be sure. If you will go back the way you came, you will overtake him easily.”

“Thanks—thanks,” cried Mab, joyfully.
“Good evening, Doctor Flinn.”

“Stop,” he exclaimed, anxiously, “I have something to say to you.”

“Another time,” answered Mab ; “I must

make haste and reach him—he might fall, you know."

"Only just hear me," entreated Doctor Flinn.

But Mab, who never attached much importance to Doctor Flinn's communications, did not heed him now; perhaps she did not hear him, for, seizing Johnny's hand, she ran at a quick pace down the gentle declivity of the lane.

Her heart felt very light and happy. A pale wintry moon had risen in the sky, and looked at them from the end of the lane, framed in by the dark thin branches of the trees. It lit the winding path of snow before them, and as they ran Mab laughed and Johnny shouted. They were out of breath when they reached the end of the lane; they looked for Mr. Ford, but he was not visible.

"Let us sit down and wait for him," said Mab; "he will soon be here."

They sat on a heap of stones placed there to mend the road, and Johnny, who had grown suddenly grave, said, seriously,

"Aunt, do you know what I have been thinking of all day?"

"No, Johnny—what is it?"

"When I am older—a man, you know—I shall go and look for my father."

"Oh, Johnny, my darling, do not say so,"

cried Mab, with sudden fear; "your search would be useless, and to see you go would break my heart. Besides, Johnny, your father would not wish it. Believe me, I knew him well, and his wish, his true wish is, that you should stay in your own country."

"He did not stay in it, aunt."

"Johnny," replied Mab, deeply moved, "he left it because his heart was broken. You have no right yet to know how or why; but what was wise and right in him would be wrong in you."

"I hate Doctor Flinn," excitedly said Johnny.

The abrupt and irrelevant remark startled Mab.

"Why so?" she asked.

"Because the other day he said to uncle in my hearing, '*that* Mr. O'Lally who went away.' What right had he to say *that* Mr. O'Lally?"

"None," replied Mab, almost as indignant as the boy. "Oh! Johnny, the world is neither good nor just, and Doctor Flinn speaks like the world. But if you survive me, as I trust you may, remember what I, who knew your father better than any one now living, remember, Johnny, what I say, if there be truth under heaven, it is true that there never was a greater or a nobler being than Mr. O'Lally, your father."

Her voice, which had faltered a little at first, now rose distinct and clear as she vindicated the lover of her youth to his child.

"I know it ! I know it !" enthusiastically cried Johnny, "and I hate Doctor Flinn."

"Oh ! Johnny, you must not say that—you must hate none. Your father never hated mortal creature ; he was far too magnanimous for that."

But Johnny was probably not magnanimous, for he had resentfully begun muttering Doctor Flinn's name, when he suddenly broke off and exclaimed :

"Why, there is uncle !"

They had not heard him coming up to them on the snow-covered ground, and there he stood, within two paces of them. Mab started up, exclaiming :

"Oh ! uncle, why did you frighten me so ?"

She fondly threw her arms around his neck, then drew back with a low cry. She knew him, but he was not Mr. Ford. The moon was clouded now, but the white earth gave back a faint low light, and even in that subdued glimmer, worn, altered as he was, she recognized him at once. Her brain swam, her limbs shook, and, like one beside herself, she cried :

"Johnny, Johnny, *this is* your father!"

For a moment the boy remained like one petrified, then he sprang forward to Mr. O'Lally's arms, and father and child exchanged a first passionate embrace. But the sudden emotion was too much for Johnny's excitable temperament; he broke into sobs so violent that Mab, alarmed, took him in her arms and attempted to soothe him.

"Johnny, my darling, you must not cry!" she entreated. "It is your father; but you know you expected him this morning—he has come, and all is well—be calm, Johnny, be calm, for my sake. Besides, we must look for uncle."

"Mr. Ford is at O'Lally's Town," said Mr. O'Lally, speaking for the first time, and a thrill shot through Mab's heart, as she heard once more the voice which had bid her adieu in Shane's Country ten years ago; "he went on first to tell you I was coming."

Johnny was trembling violently, as Mab felt, for she held him pressed against her.

"Oh! let us make haste in!" she cried; "something ails the child."

"Let me carry him," said Mr. O'Lally. He raised him in his arms, and, wrapping him in the folds of his thick plaid, walked on swiftly.

Mab preceded him more swiftly still. In a few minutes they reached the house. Still preceded by Mab, Mr. O'Lally carried Johnny to his room, near Mab's, and softly laid him on his bed. The boy was in a burning fever.

Mab gave Mr. O'Lally a frightened glance.

"Pray, do not be uneasy," he said, calmly; "I know something of fevers, after ten years of travelling, and this is the result of excitement —no more."

"I wish to believe you, Mr. O'Lally."

"But you would like to see Doctor Flinn," he interrupted, with his old smile; "I shall go and look for him."

As Doctor Flinn was just then entering O'Lally's Town, Mr. O'Lally's search was not a long one. On hearing what ailed Johnny, Doctor Flinn imperatively forbade his father to go near him.

"You caused the mischief," he said, "do not make bad worse."

Mr. O'Lally entered the sitting-room, and there he found Mr. Ford.

"How did Mab bear it?" he asked eagerly.

"Miss O'Flaherty has good nerves," drily replied Mr. O'Lally; "but the boy is agitated—. Doctor Flinn is with him."

Mr. Ford raised his hands.

"I hope nothing ails Johnny," he cried, alarmed,
"Mab dotes on him."

Mr. O'Lally said nothing. The door opened, he looked round, it was not Mab, but Doctor Flinn.

"I declare Miss O'Flaherty is crazy about that boy," said Doctor Flinn; "he is excited—no more, and she will not leave him just yet."

Mr. Ford looked puzzled, and glanced timidly at Mr. O'Lally. It was very strange—he knew that Mr. O'Lally was not married, for he had put the question ; that on finding an old newspaper with Mab's advertisement, he had come immediately from the depths of South America, to see Mab and his child—yet this did not seem much like a lover's meeting. Doctor Flinn, too, looked perplexed and disappointed, and soon left. The door had scarcely closed upon him when it opened again—Mr. O'Lally had another quick look, this time it was Alicia who crept up to her grandfather's knee.

Mr. O'Lally had learned from Miss Flinn whose child she was, and, better than that lady had told him, he now realized the life Mab had led since they had parted. Ah! youth

and beauty, gay temper and warm heart, was this your destiny ?

But Mr. O'Lally was not the man to linger over sad and unavailing thoughts ; he roused himself, took a turn round the room, came back, and entertained Mr. Ford with a graphic account of his ten years of wandering. It appeared that he had been travelling more for business than for pleasure, and that the success which had failed him in his own land had not been wanting in foreign countries. Mr. O'Lally did not say he was a rich man, but it was evident to Mr. Ford that he was so. "He will never marry her," he thought, and indeed there was nothing in Mr. O'Lally's speech or manner that betokened thoughts of marriage.

Mab did not come down to dinner. Johnny was still restless, and she would not leave him. The meal went off quietly, and the evening was rather dull and silent. As time passed, and Mr. Ford, accustomed to early hours, grew heavy, Mr. O'Lally smiled and said :

"Do not sit up for me, Mr. Ford, for, to tell you the truth, I mean to spend the night in this room."

"You will not go to bed !" exclaimed Mr. Ford.

"I had rather not. Constant travelling has made me restless, and my temperament enables me to do with very little sleep, and sleep to-night I could not, Mr. Ford."

His keen look wandered around the room expressively. Even Mr. Ford vaguely understood how and why Mr. O'Lally could not sleep on the first night of his return to his old home. The home of his dead sisters, of his dead wife, and his own dead hopes. No, there are places which are not made for peaceful and happy slumbers.

"Mab could not sleep when we first came here," said Mr. Ford, slowly rising, and, with a timid good night, he left the room.

Mr. O'Lally remained alone; hours passed, and he heeded them not. The past was with him—the bitter, sweet, and tormenting past. It kept him company by that once familiar hearth, in that room, so little changed that it seemed as if his sisters should be sitting in their places, as if Annie's dark face, or Mab's, so girlish and so fair, should appear in the opening door.

Part of the vision came true. The door opened softly, and Mab entered, her finger on her lips, the light of the candle she held shining full on her smiling face. If the bloom

of youth was gone, its hope and joy were not. She came towards him with light foot-steps, gladness beaming once more over her whole aspect. When she stood within a few paces of him, she put down the light on the table, and said softly :

“ He is well now ; he is fast asleep.”

Mr. O’Lally rose with irrepressible emotion. He went up to her, his brow was flushed, a smile of mingled doubt and hope struggled on his lips.

“ Mab—Miss Winter,” he began, then suddenly ceased, unable to say more. It was her old name came back to him then, and as Mab heard it, ten weary years rolled back to their fountain-head. She was no longer Mary O’Flaherty, to be wooed and won anew, she was Mab Winter, the girl of twenty, and he was young Mr. O’Lally, and it was yesterday they parted in bitterness and sorrow, and now they met again after that dreary night of separation, and love was free. She turned to him ; lover or friend, her whole heart yearned towards him in that hour. She did not speak, but there was that in her look and mien that said, “ I am yours—take me.” And he took her to his heart, and pressed her to it with the love of ten years back.

"Ah! it is too late!" at length said Mab, untwining his arms from around her, and speaking half in jest, half in earnest.

"Too late!" he reproachfully replied. "Ah! if you loved me half as much as you love that boy upstairs, you would not say it is too late."

Mab turned her flushed face away from his gaze.

"For whose sake did I love him?" she asked.

"For mine," he replied with a secure smile; "for mine, Mab."

"And perhaps I like you now for his, Mr. O'Lally," she said, half stung at his boasting tone.

"Do not say it," he replied, with something like sorrow in his look, "for I might believe you. Ten years was a long trial, yet I should find it hard to be second where I once was first."

Mab looked at the fire, and smiled.

"I like Johnny dearly," she said, "but I like Johnny's father better still."

She raised her fearless eyes full to his; she was still the same Mab Winter as of old—open, frank, and true.

Mr. O'Lally sat down, and, making her sit down by him, he looked at her with the deepest tenderness he had never felt or shown to woman.

"Mab," he said, taking her hand in his, "I never knew you loved me so much."

"Do not thank me for it," replied Mab, a little sadly; "I cannot help myself. It was decreed in heaven I should love but once, and that this love should last my lifetime—but I could have lived without you," she added, smiling mischievously.

"So I perceive—for you look in excellent health, Miss Winter."

Miss Winter laughed gaily; and let none grudge her that for an hour she felt as young and as happy as at twenty.

They sat up late that night, talking as if their hearts could never cease to overflow, whilst the turf fire burned cheerily on the hearth of their old Irish home. Happy vigil! all the more blessed that it had been bought so dear.

When Johnny awoke, calm and well, the next morning, he found two happy faces bending over him—one dreamed of since he could think, the other loved since he could remember.

Mr. Ford looked at them wistfully, then stole out of the room unheard and unheeded. On the landing he found Alicia. Childlike, he told her what was passing in his mind.

"Alicia, I have nothing to wish for, nothing to

regret now—I shall soon be ready—soon be ready."

And so he will—the signs are on him—the darkness of evening is slowly closing round John Ford.

THE END.

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